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THE UNCANNY
X-MEN™
COCKRUM / WALTER

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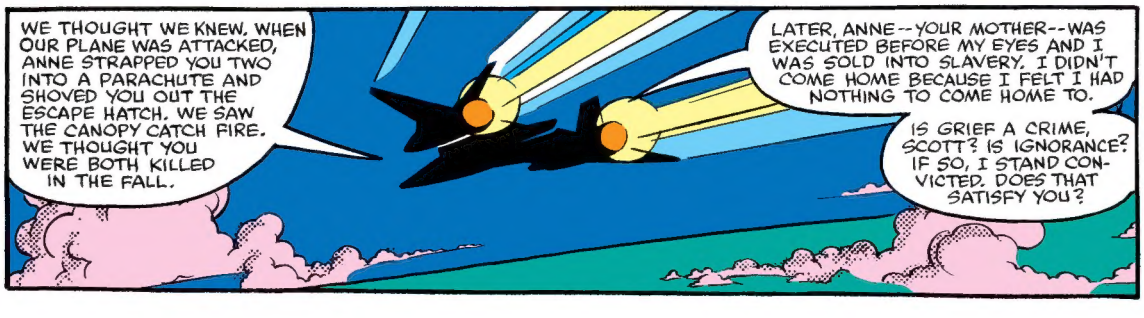
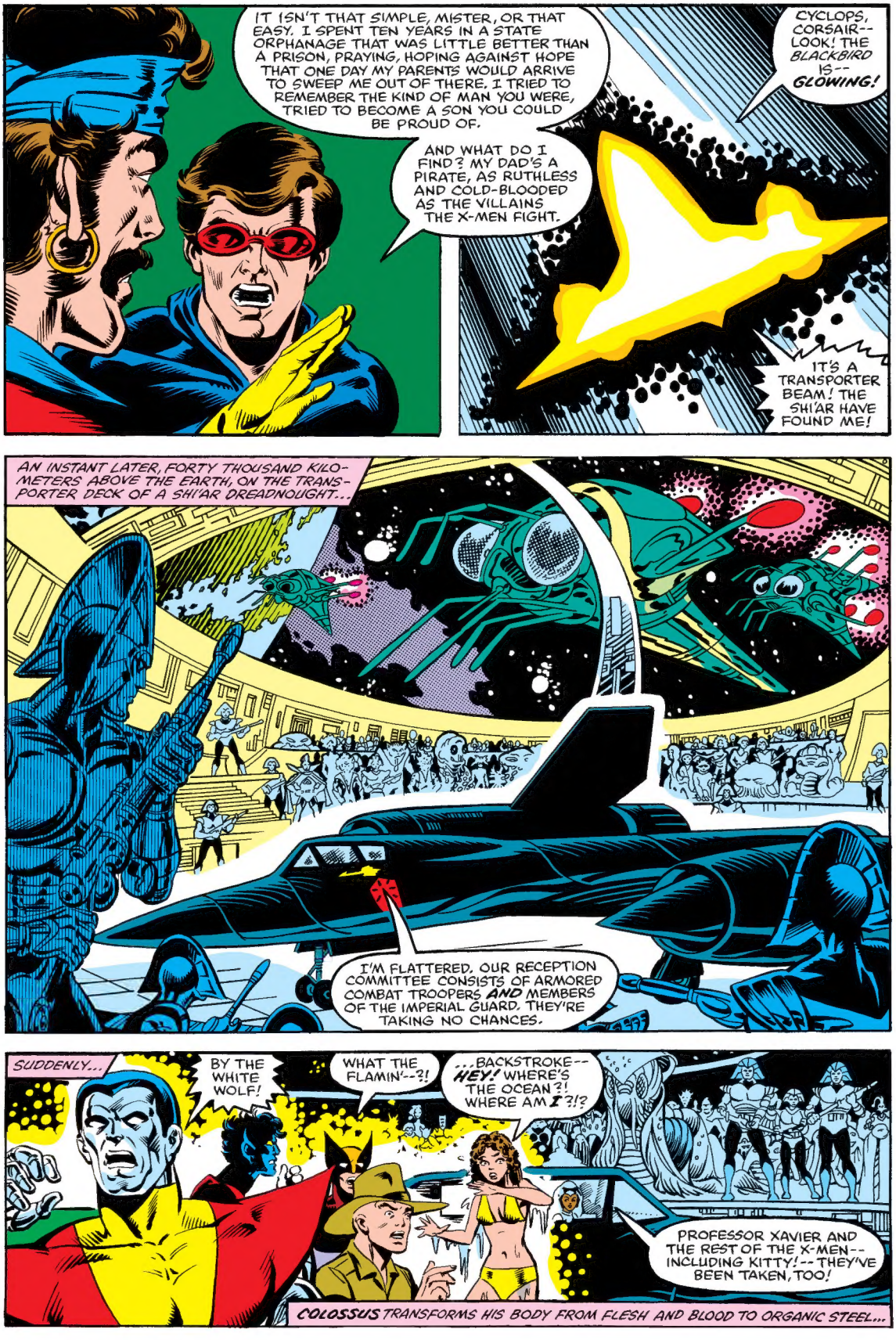
I AM.
A FRIEND DOESN'T BETRAY A TRUST, OR LIE. YOU KNEW CORSAIR WAS MY FATHER--YOU'VE KNOWN FOR MONTHS, EVER SINCE THE X-MEN FIRST MET HIM*--YET YOU NEVER TOLD ME.
AS YOU SAID, A FRIEND DOES NOT BETRAY HER TRUST.
*ISSUE # 107 --L.

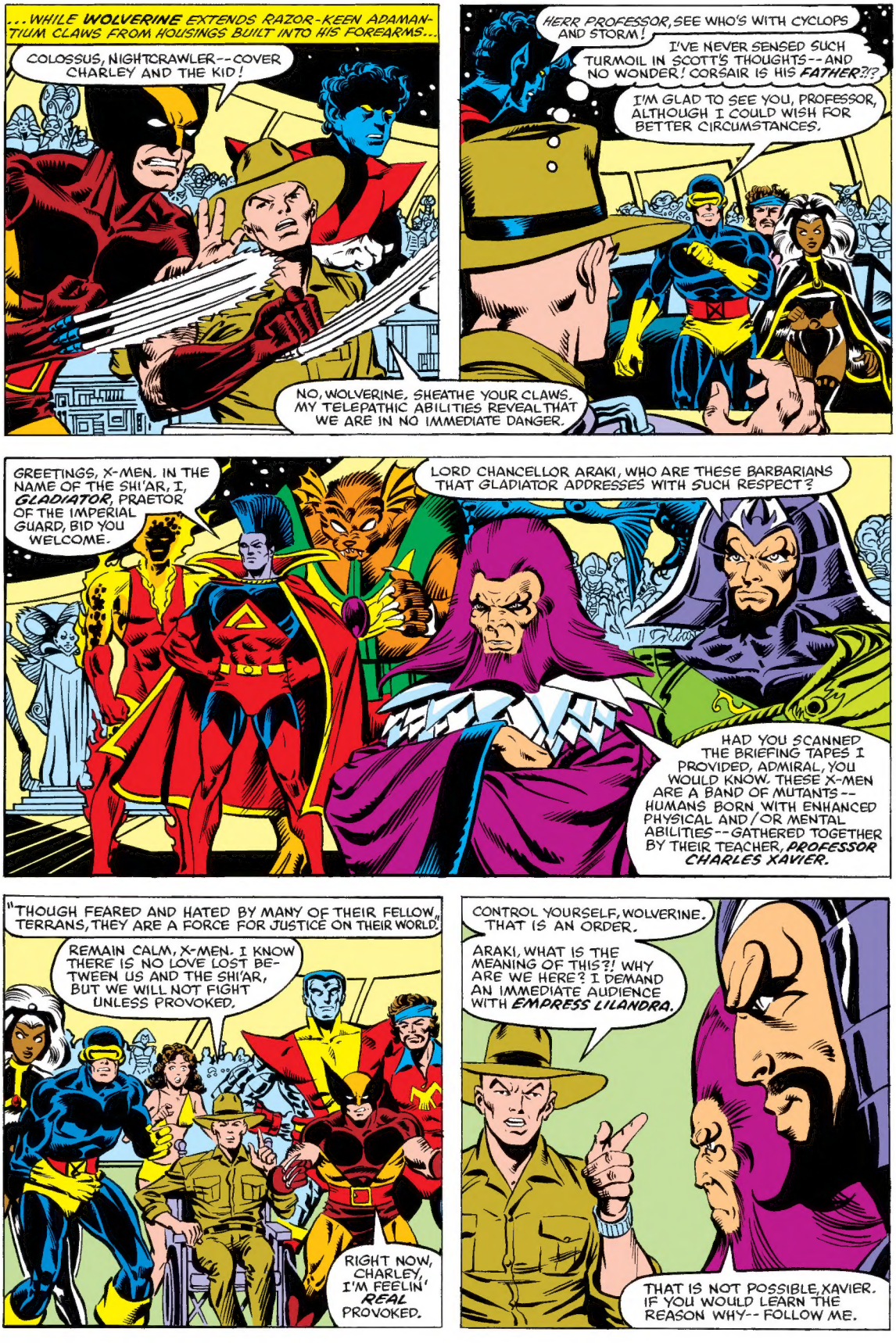
I PROMISED JEAN I WOULD NOT REVEAL THE TRUTH TO YOU.
WHY DIDN'T SHE TELL ME?! WE LOVED EACH OTHER--OR SO I THOUGHT--YET SHE KEPT THAT SECRET...
...EVEN WHEN OUR MINDS WERE LINKED EN RAPPORT. WHY?!

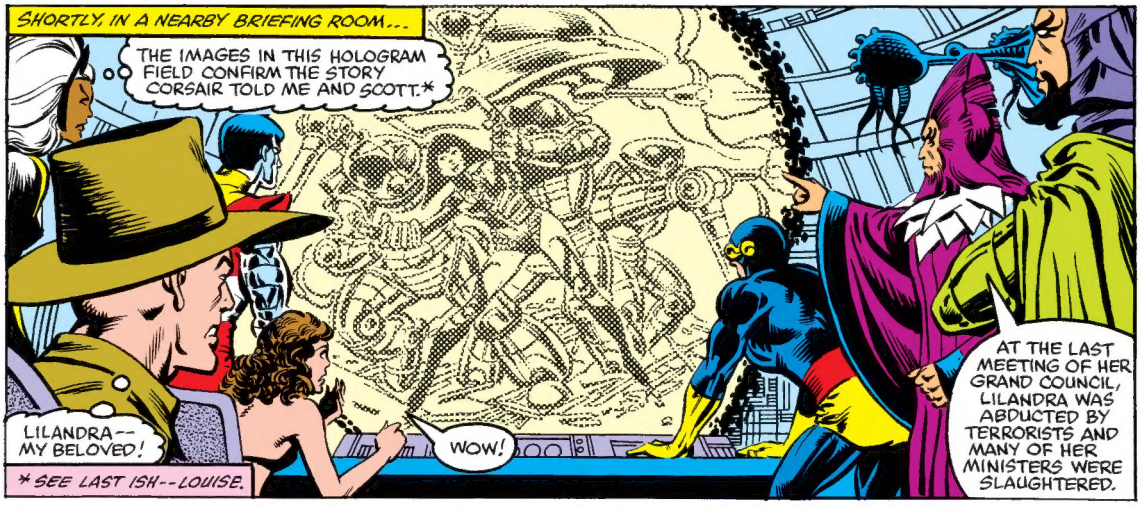
BECAUSE I ASKED HER TO.
I'D BEEN AWAY FROM EARTH TOO LONG. I HAD NO INTENTION OF GOING BACK, AND SINCE YOU'D OBVIOUSLY FORGOTTEN ME, SCOTT, I THOUGHT IT BETTER NOT TO REVEAL MYSELF AS A FATHER YOU'D SEE ONCE, BRIEFLY, AND PROBABLY NEVER AGAIN.

I THOUGHT ONLY TO SPARE YOU PAIN.
DID YOU?!!
ARE YOU SURE YOU WEREN'T MOTIVATED BY GUILT, AND SHAME AT COMING FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE CHILDREN YOU'D DESERTED?!
THAT'S UNFAIR, SCOTT. YOUR MOTHER AND I DIDN'T LEAVE YOU BY CHOICE. WE WERE KIDNAPPED BY THE SHI'AR.
TWENTY YEARS AGO!
AND IN THOSE TWO DECADES, DID YOU EVER EVEN TRY TO LEARN WHAT HAPPENED TO ALEX AND ME?!

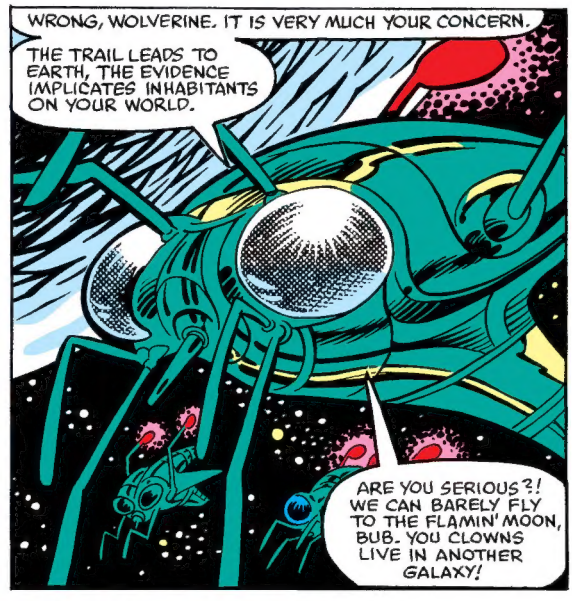

WE THOUGHT WE KNEW. WHEN OUR PLANE WAS ATTACKED, ANNE STRAPPED YOU TWO INTO A PARACHUTE AND SHOVED YOU OUT THE ESCAPE HATCH. WE SAW THE CANOPY CATCH FIRE. WE THOUGHT YOU WERE BOTH KILLED IN THE FALL.
LATER, ANNE--YOUR MOTHER--WAS EXECUTED BEFORE MY EYES AND I WAS SOLD INTO SLAVERY. I DIDN'T COME HOME BECAUSE I FELT I HAD NOTHING TO COME HOME TO.
IS GRIEF A CRIME, SCOTT? IS IGNORANCE? IF SO, I STAND CONVICTED. DOES THAT SATISFY YOU?


IT ISN'T THAT SIMPLE, MISTER, OR THAT EASY. I SPENT TEN YEARS IN A STATE ORPHANAGE THAT WAS LITTLE BETTER THAN A PRISON, PRAYING, HOPING AGAINST HOPE THAT ONE DAY MY PARENTS WOULD ARRIVE TO SWEEP ME OUT OF THERE. I TRIED TO REMEMBER THE KIND OF MAN YOU WERE, TRIED TO BECOME A SON YOU COULD BE PROUD OF.
AND WHAT DO I FIND? MY DAD'S A PIRATE, AS RUTHLESS AND COLD-BLOODED AS THE VILLAINS THE X-MEN FIGHT.
CYCLOPS, CORSAIR-- LOOK! THE BLACKBIRD IS-- GLOWING!
IT'S A TRANSPORTER BEAM! THE SHI'AR HAVE FOUND ME!
AN INSTANT LATER, FORTY THOUSAND KILOMETERS ABOVE THE EARTH, ON THE TRANSPORTER DECK OF A SHI'AR DREADNOUGHT...
I'M FLATTERED. OUR RECEPTION COMMITTEE CONSISTS OF ARMORED COMBAT TROOPERS AND MEMBERS OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD. THEY'RE TAKING NO CHANCES.
SUDDENLY...
BY THE WHITE WOLF!
WHAT THE FLAMIN'--?!
...BACKSTROKE-- HEY! WHERE'S THE OCEAN?! WHERE AM I?!?
PROFESSOR XAVIER AND THE REST OF THE X-MEN-- INCLUDING KITTY!-- THEY'VE BEEN TAKEN, TOO!
COLOSSUS TRANSFORMS HIS BODY FROM FLESH AND BLOOD TO ORGANIC STEEL...


...WHILE WOLVERINE EXTENDS RAZOR-KEEN ADAMANTIUM CLAWS FROM HOUSINGS BUILT INTO HIS FOREARMS...
COLOSSUS, NIGHTCRAWLER--COVER CHARLEY AND THE KID!
NO, WOLVERINE. SHEATHE YOUR CLAWS. MY TELEPATHIC ABILITIES REVEAL THAT WE ARE IN NO IMMEDIATE DANGER.
HERR PROFESSOR, SEE WHO'S WITH CYCLOPS AND STORM!
I'VE NEVER SENSED SUCH TURMOIL IN SCOTT'S THOUGHTS--AND NO WONDER! CORSAIR IS HIS FATHER?!?
I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU, PROFESSOR, ALTHOUGH I COULD WISH FOR BETTER CIRCUMSTANCES.
GREETINGS, X-MEN. IN THE NAME OF THE SHI'AR, I, GLADIATOR, PRAETOR OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD, BID YOU WELCOME.
LORD CHANCELLOR ARAKI, WHO ARE THESE BARBARIANS THAT GLADIATOR ADDRESSES WITH SUCH RESPECT?
HAD YOU SCANNED THE BRIEFING TAPES I PROVIDED, ADMIRAL, YOU WOULD KNOW. THESE X-MEN ARE A BAND OF MUTANTS--HUMANS BORN WITH ENHANCED PHYSICAL AND/OR MENTAL ABILITIES--GATHERED TOGETHER BY THEIR TEACHER, PROFESSOR CHARLES XAVIER.
"THOUGH FEARED AND HATED BY MANY OF THEIR FELLOW TERRANS, THEY ARE A FORCE FOR JUSTICE ON THEIR WORLD."
REMAIN CALM, X-MEN. I KNOW THERE IS NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN US AND THE SHI'AR, BUT WE WILL NOT FIGHT UNLESS PROVOKED.
RIGHT NOW, CHARLEY, I'M FEELIN' REAL PROVOKED.
CONTROL YOURSELF, WOLVERINE. THAT IS AN ORDER.
ARAKI, WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?! WHY ARE WE HERE? I DEMAND AN IMMEDIATE AUDIENCE WITH EMPRESS LILANDRA.
THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE, XAVIER. IF YOU WOULD LEARN THE REASON WHY--FOLLOW ME.

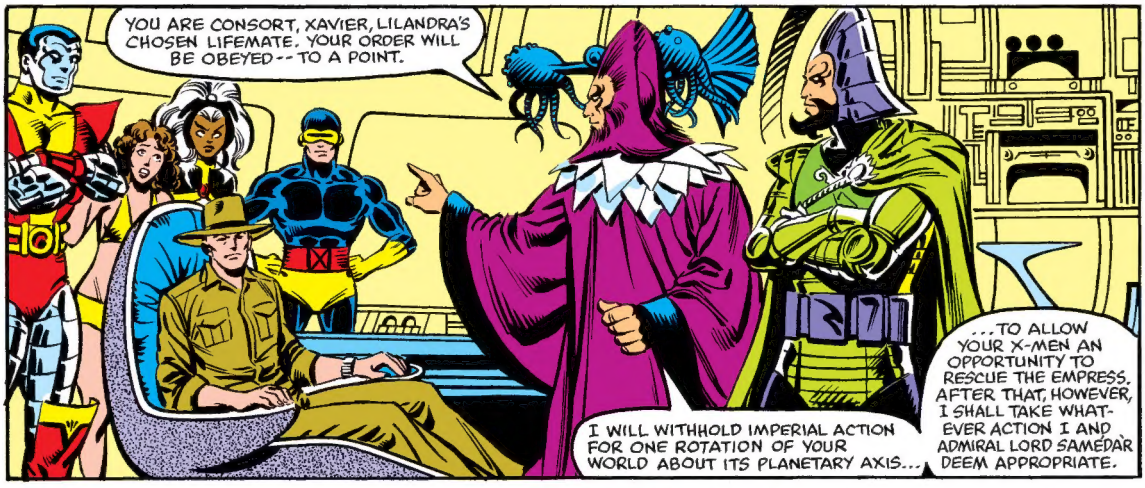

SHORTLY, IN A NEARBY BRIEFING ROOM...
THE IMAGES IN THIS HOLOGRAM FIELD CONFIRM THE STORY CORSAIR TOLD ME AND SCOTT.*
LILANDRA-- MY BELOVED!
WOW!
AT THE LAST MEETING OF HER GRAND COUNCIL, LILANDRA WAS ABDUCTED BY TERRORISTS AND MANY OF HER MINISTERS WERE SLAUGHTERED.
* SEE LAST ISH--LOUISE.

IS SHE DEAD?! NO, SHE CAN'T BE-- OTHERWISE, I'D HAVE SENSED IT THROUGH THE RAPPORT WE SHARE.
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS OUTRAGE, ARAKI? WHY DID THEY DO IT? WHERE HAVE THEY TAKEN HER?!
WHO CARES? THIS IS A SHI'AR PROBLEM, CHARLEY. IT'S NONE OF OUR CONCERN.


WRONG, WOLVERINE. IT IS VERY MUCH YOUR CONCERN.
THE TRAIL LEADS TO EARTH, THE EVIDENCE IMPLICATES INHABITANTS ON YOUR WORLD.
ARE YOU SERIOUS?! WE CAN BARELY FLY TO THE FLAMIN' MOON, BUB. YOU CLOWNS LIVE IN ANOTHER GALAXY!

SUPPOSE LILANDRA IS HERE, WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE TO DO ABOUT IT?
LIBERATE HER IF SHE IS ALIVE. AVENGE HER IF SHE IS NOT. CORSAIR IS ONE OF THE CONSPIRATORS. HE WILL BE PUNISHED FOR HIS TREASON. WE WILL USE XAVIER'S PSYCHIC BOND WITH THE EMPRESS TO ENABLE US TO LOCATE HER.
THEN WE WILL SEND A FORCE OF IMPERIAL GUARD AND COMBAT TROOPERS TO EFFECT HER RELEASE.

NO! I AM SHIVARN'N HALANAU--THE IMPERIAL CONSORT. I FORBID THAT COURSE OF ACTION. IT WOULD CERTAINLY RESULT IN LILANDRA'S DEATH AND THE DESTRUCTION OF LIVES AND PROPERTY ON EARTH AS WELL.
YOU ARE BARBARIANS, LACKING EVEN A RUDIMENTARY WORLD GOVERNMENT. YOUR LIVES, YOUR PUNY PLANET, MEAN NOTHING TO THE SHI'AR.
DO YOU DEFY MY LAWFUL COMMAND, ADMIRAL?

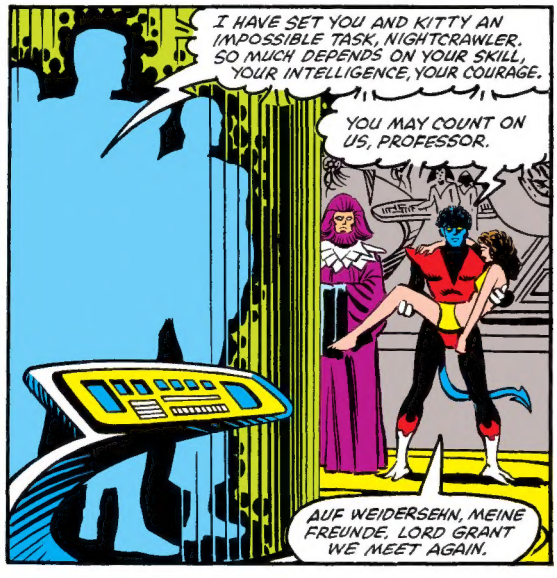

YOU ARE CONSORT, XAVIER, LILANDRA'S CHOSEN LIFEMATE. YOUR ORDER WILL BE OBEYED -- TO A POINT.
I WILL WITHHOLD IMPERIAL ACTION FOR ONE ROTATION OF YOUR WORLD ABOUT ITS PLANETARY AXIS...
...TO ALLOW YOUR X-MEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESCUE THE EMPRESS. AFTER THAT, HOWEVER, I SHALL TAKE WHATEVER ACTION I AND ADMIRAL LORD SAMEDAR DEEM APPROPRIATE.

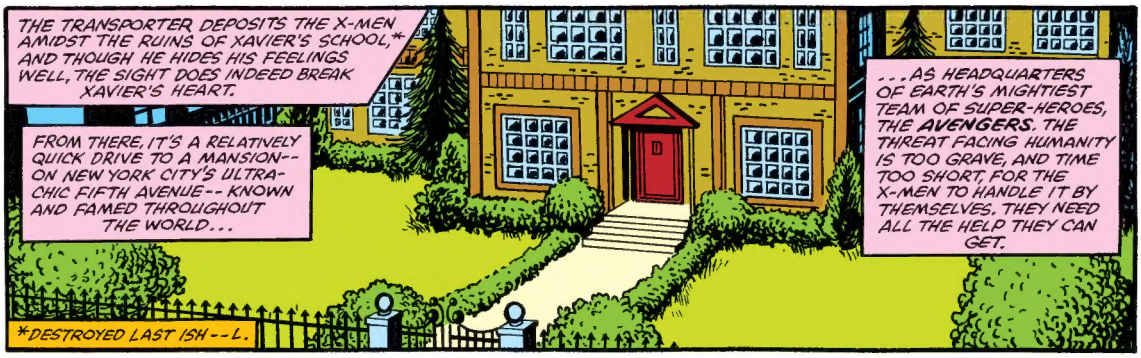
AS A GUARANTEE OF YOUR GOOD FAITH, I REQUIRE TWO OF YOUR STUDENTS TO REMAIN HERE AS HOSTAGES.
DO YOU DOUBT MY WORD, ARAKI, OR MY LOVE FOR LILANDRA?!
THESE ARE DANGEROUS TIMES, XAVIER. I DOUBT EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE.

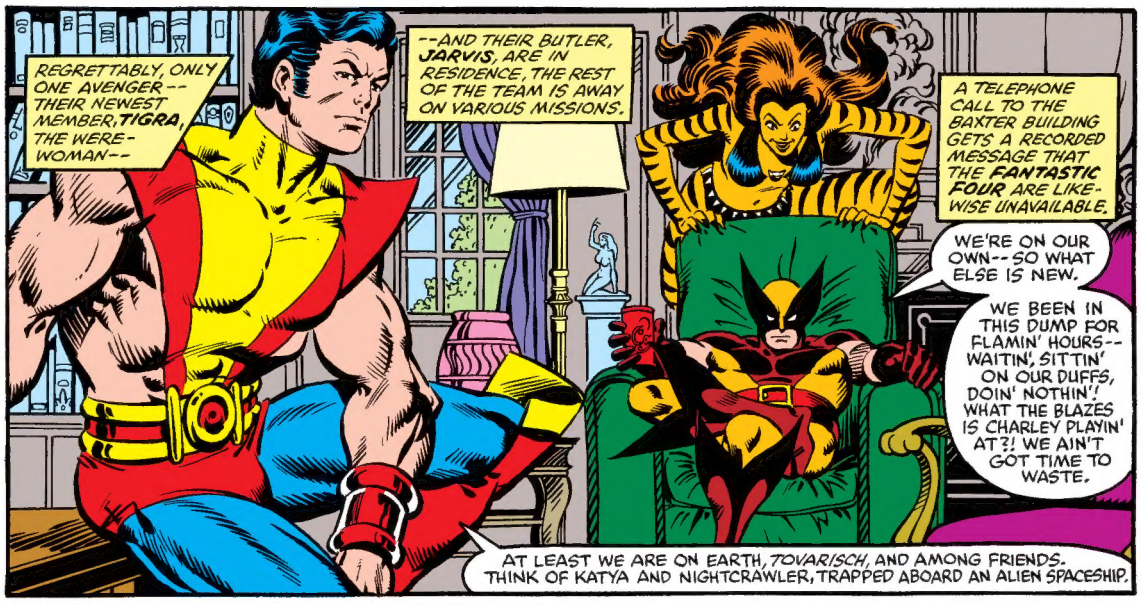
CYCLOPS, I'D APPRECIATE YOUR SUGGESTIONS IN THIS MATTER. AND YOURS ALSO, STORM, OF COURSE.
I AM TEAM LEADER, NOW, YET THE PROFESSOR ASKS SCOTT FIRST. AS SCOTT SAID, OLD HABITS DO DIE HARD.

THE CONFERENCE IS BRIEF, THE DECISION RELUCTANTLY UNANIMOUS.
I'M SCARED, PROFESSOR.
BUCK UP, KATZCHEN. I'LL PROTECT YOU.
THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY, KITTY.
I MUST ACT QUICKLY -- UNDER COVER OF OUR FAREWELL EMBRACE -- TO FORGE A MIND-LINK WITH KITTY...

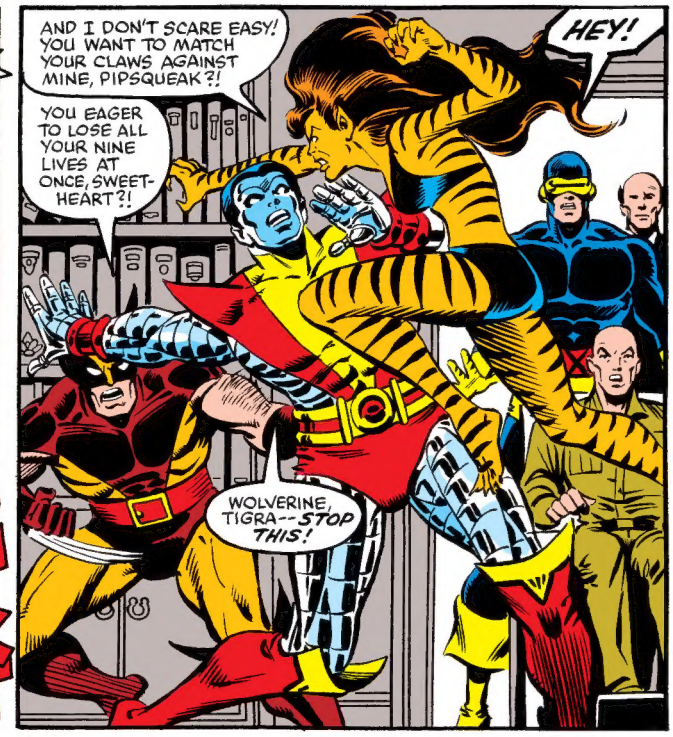
OH!
KATYA!
...AND FILL HER BRAIN WITH ALL MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE SHI'AR. FORGIVE ME, CHILD. I KNOW THIS SUDDEN, UNEXPECTED INFLUX OF DATA SEEMS OVERWHELMING, BUT IT MAY SAVE OUR LIVES, AND OUR WORLD.
SHE IS ALL RIGHT, X-MEN. SHE MERELY FAINTED.

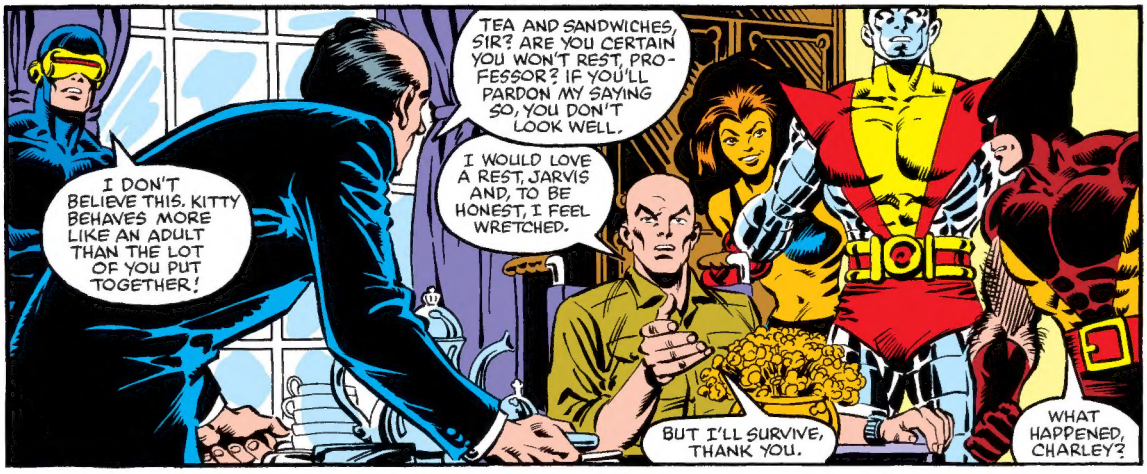

I HAVE SET YOU AND KITTY AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK, NIGHTCRAWLER. SO MUCH DEPENDS ON YOUR SKILL, YOUR INTELLIGENCE, YOUR COURAGE.
YOU MAY COUNT ON US, PROFESSOR.
AUF WEIDERSEHN, MEINE FREUNDE. LORD GRANT WE MEET AGAIN.


THE TRANSPORTER DEPOSITS THE X-MEN AMIDST THE RUINS OF XAVIER'S SCHOOL,* AND THOUGH HE HIDES HIS FEELINGS WELL, THE SIGHT DOES INDEED BREAK XAVIER'S HEART.
FROM THERE, IT'S A RELATIVELY QUICK DRIVE TO A MANSION-- ON NEW YORK CITY'S ULTRA-CHIC FIFTH AVENUE-- KNOWN AND FAMED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD...
...AS HEADQUARTERS OF EARTH'S MIGHTIEST TEAM OF SUPER-HEROES, THE AVENGERS. THE THREAT FACING HUMANITY IS TOO GRAVE, AND TIME TOO SHORT, FOR THE X-MEN TO HANDLE IT BY THEMSELVES. THEY NEED ALL THE HELP THEY CAN GET.
*DESTROYED LAST ISH--L.

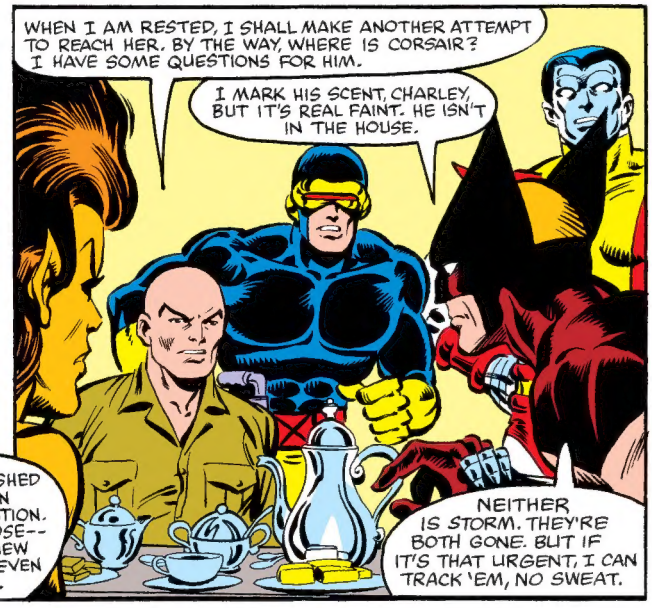

REGRETTABLY, ONLY ONE AVENGER-- THEIR NEWEST MEMBER, TIGRA, THE WERE-WOMAN--
--AND THEIR BUTLER, JARVIS, ARE IN RESIDENCE, THE REST OF THE TEAM IS AWAY ON VARIOUS MISSIONS.
A TELEPHONE CALL TO THE BAXTER BUILDING GETS A RECORDED MESSAGE THAT THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE LIKE-WISE UNAVAILABLE.
WE'RE ON OUR OWN--SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW.
WE BEEN IN THIS DUMP FOR FLAMIN' HOURS-- WAITIN', SIT'TIN' ON OUR DUFFS, DOIN' NOTHIN'! WHAT THE BLAZES IS CHARLEY PLAYIN' AT?! WE AIN'T GOT TIME TO WASTE.
AT LEAST WE ARE ON EARTH, TOVARISCH, AND AMONG FRIENDS. THINK OF KATYA AND NIGHTCRAWLER, TRAPPED ABOARD AN ALIEN SPACESHIP.

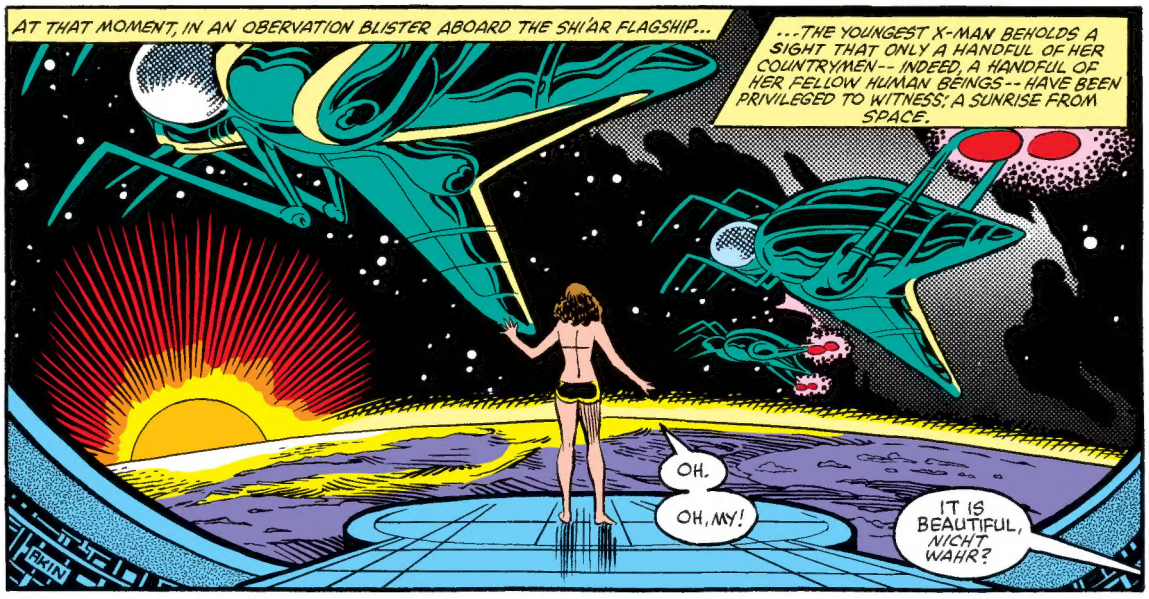
CHEER UP, BUNKIES! NO SENSE LETTING DOOM-AN'-GLOOM RULE THE DAY--
YRRROWL?!?
BACK OFF, LADY CAT.
I AIN'T IN THE MOOD.
SNIKT

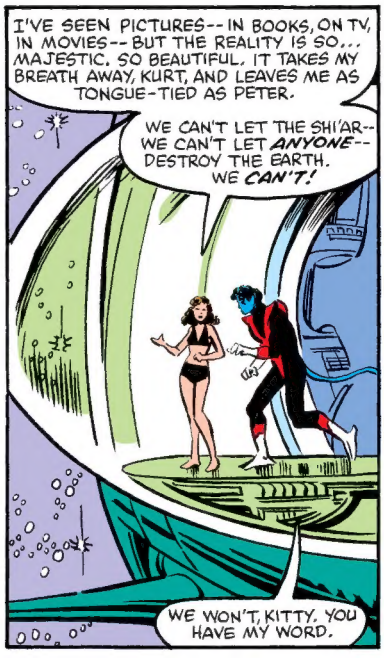

AND I DON'T SCARE EASY! YOU WANT TO MATCH YOUR CLAWS AGAINST MINE, PIPSQUEAK?!
HEY!
YOU EAGER TO LOSE ALL YOUR NINE LIVES AT ONCE, SWEET-HEART?!
WOLVERINE, TIGRA--STOP THIS!

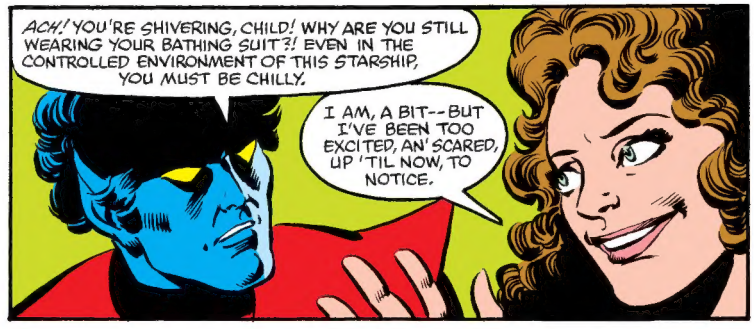

I DON'T BELIEVE THIS. KITTY BEHAVES MORE LIKE AN ADULT THAN THE LOT OF YOU PUT TOGETHER!
TEA AND SANDWICHES, SIR? ARE YOU CERTAIN YOU WON'T REST, PROFESSOR? IF YOU'LL PARDON MY SAYING SO, YOU DON'T LOOK WELL.
I WOULD LOVE A REST, JARVIS AND, TO BE HONEST, I FEEL WRETCHED.
BUT I'LL SURVIVE, THANK YOU.
WHAT HAPPENED, CHARLEY?

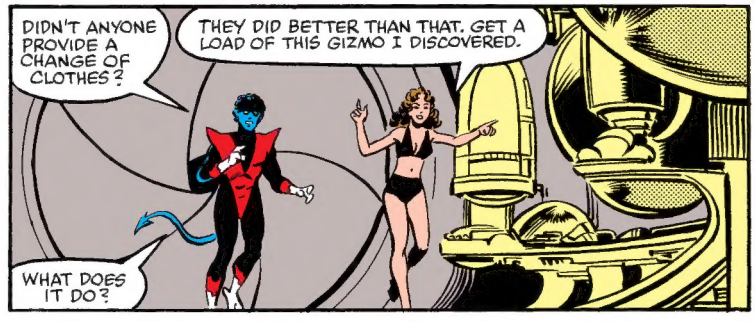
WOLVERINE, I REALLY DO HATE THAT NAME. IF YOU MUST BE FAMILIAR, PLEASE CALL ME "CHARLES." OR BETTER YET, "PROFESSOR."
I TRIED TO ESTABLISH TELEPATHIC CONTACT WITH LILANDRA. I WAS ANTICIPATED. OUR FOES RIGGED A PSIONIC AMBUSH. I BARELY MANAGED TO ESCAPE.
BUT I ESTABLISHED A ROUGH FIX ON LILANDRA'S LOCATION. SHE IS VERY CLOSE-- SOMEWHERE IN NEW YORK, PERHAPS EVEN MANHATTAN.

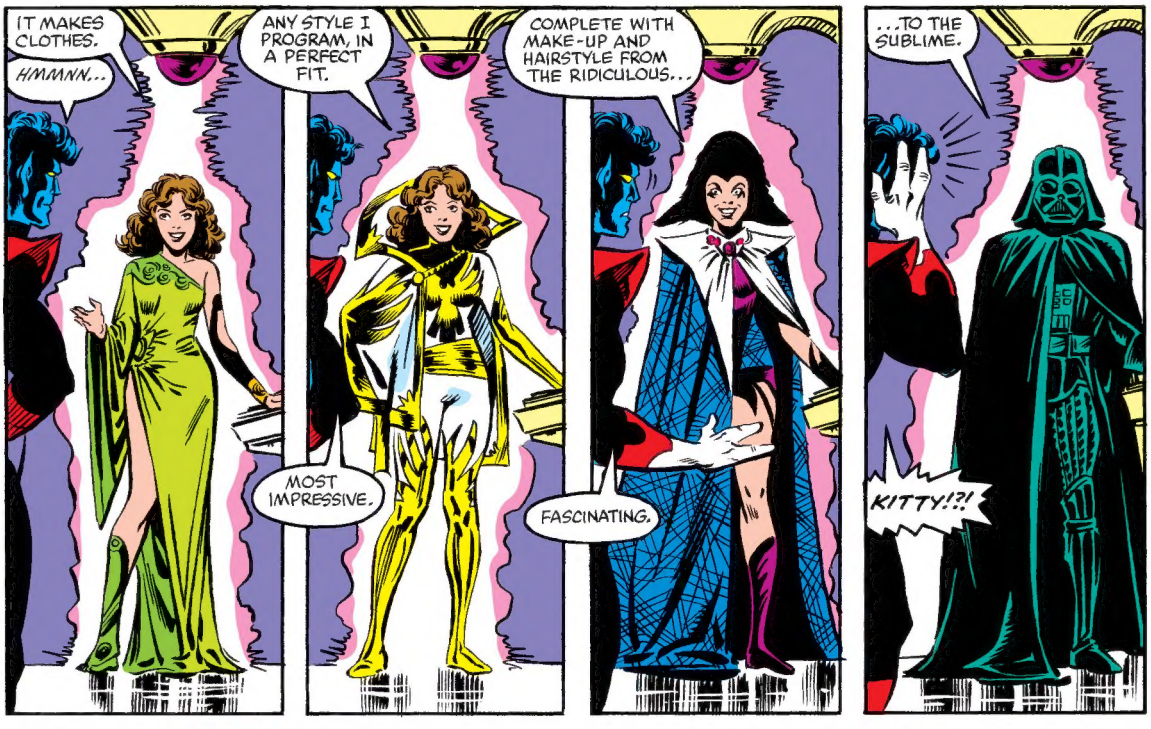

WHEN I AM RESTED, I SHALL MAKE ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO REACH HER. BY THE WAY, WHERE IS CORSAIR? I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR HIM.
I MARK HIS SCENT, CHARLEY, BUT IT'S REAL FAINT. HE ISN'T IN THE HOUSE.
NEITHER IS STORM. THEY'RE BOTH GONE. BUT IF IT'S THAT URGENT, I CAN TRACK 'EM, NO SWEAT.

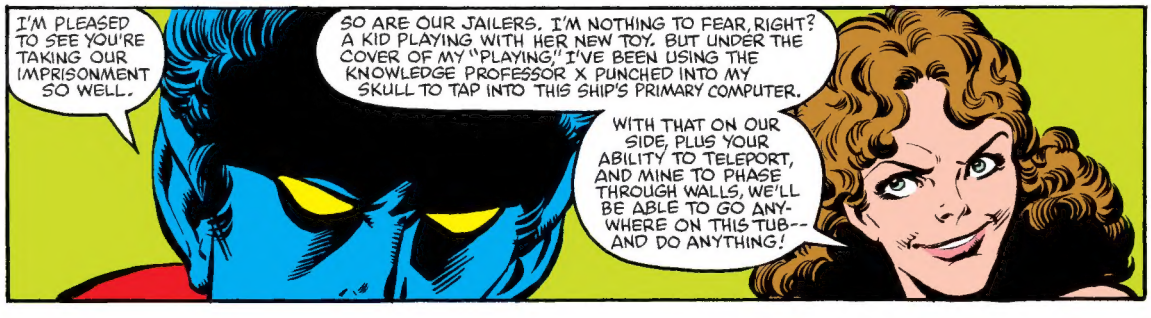

AT THAT MOMENT, IN AN OBERVATION BLISTER ABOARD THE SHI'AR FLAGSHIP...
...THE YOUNGEST X-MAN BEHOLDS A SIGHT THAT ONLY A HANDFUL OF HER COUNTRYMEN-- INDEED, A HANDFUL OF HER FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS-- HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED TO WITNESS: A SUNRISE FROM SPACE.
OH.
OH, MY!
IT IS BEAUTIFUL, NICHT WAHR?


I'VE SEEN PICTURES--IN BOOKS, ON TV, IN MOVIES--BUT THE REALITY IS SO... MAJESTIC. SO BEAUTIFUL. IT TAKES MY BREATH AWAY, KURT, AND LEAVES ME AS TONGUE-TIED AS PETER.
WE CAN'T LET THE SHI'AR--WE CAN'T LET ANYONE--DESTROY THE EARTH. WE CAN'T!
WE WON'T, KITTY. YOU HAVE MY WORD.


ACH! YOU'RE SHIVERING, CHILD! WHY ARE YOU STILL WEARING YOUR BATHING SUIT?! EVEN IN THE CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT OF THIS STARSHIP, YOU MUST BE CHILLY.
I AM, A BIT--BUT I'VE BEEN TOO EXCITED, AN' SCARED, UP 'TIL NOW, TO NOTICE.


DIDN'T ANYONE PROVIDE A CHANGE OF CLOTHES?
THEY DID BETTER THAN THAT. GET A LOAD OF THIS GIZMO I DISCOVERED.
WHAT DOES IT DO?


IT MAKES CLOTHES.
HMMMN...
ANY STYLE I PROGRAM, IN A PERFECT FIT.
MOST IMPRESSIVE.
COMPLETE WITH MAKE-UP AND HAIRSTYLE FROM THE RIDICULOUS...
FASCINATING.
...TO THE SUBLIME.
KITTY!?!


I'M PLEASED TO SEE YOU'RE TAKING OUR IMPRISONMENT SO WELL.
SO ARE OUR JAILERS. I'M NOTHING TO FEAR, RIGHT? A KID PLAYING WITH HER NEW TOY. BUT UNDER THE COVER OF MY "PLAYING," I'VE BEEN USING THE KNOWLEDGE PROFESSOR X PUNCHED INTO MY SKULL TO TAP INTO THIS SHIP'S PRIMARY COMPUTER.
WITH THAT ON OUR SIDE, PLUS YOUR ABILITY TO TELEPORT, AND MINE TO PHASE THROUGH WALLS, WE'LL BE ABLE TO GO ANYWHERE ON THIS TUB--AND DO ANYTHING!

IT'S SO DIFFERENT, ORORO. SO MUCH BIGGER, MORE CROWDED. THE LAST TIME I VISITED NEW YORK, NONE OF THESE BUILDINGS EXISTED. THE ENTIRE FACE OF THE CITY--OF THE COUNTRY, OF THE WORLD--HAS CHANGED, ALMOST BEYOND BELIEF.
AND YET, IT ALL SEEMS SO PRIMITIVE TO ME.
I'VE BEEN SO FAR, SEEN SO MUCH. MY WORLD ISN'T... MINE ANYMORE.
I'VE HEARD SIMILAR SENTIMENTS FROM COLOSSUS.
E57ST
DON'T WALK

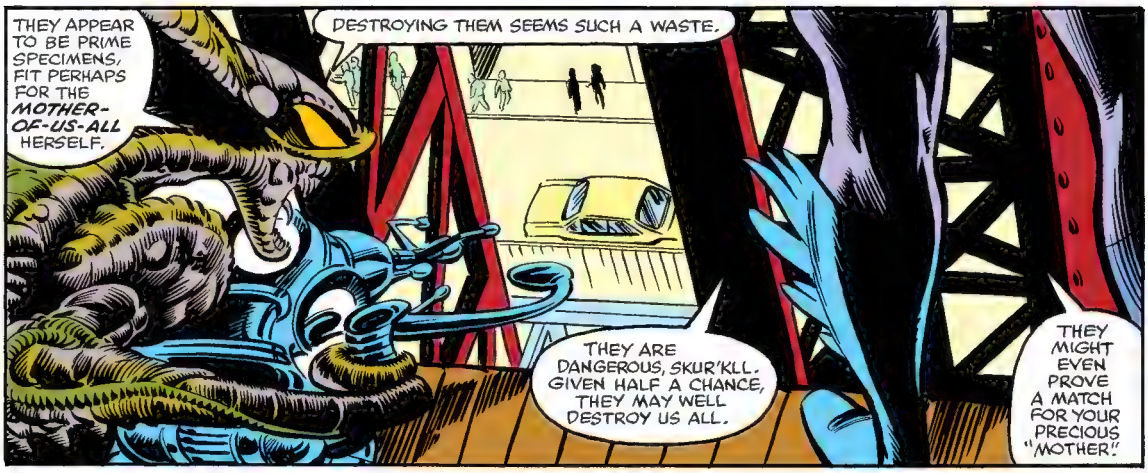
BECAUSE OF HIS EXPERIENCES AS AN X-MAN, PETER FEARS HE HAS LOST FOREVER THE SIMPLE FARMER'S LIFE HE ONCE ENJOYED. IN HIS HEART, HE KNOWS HE CAN NEVER TRULY RETURN TO THAT. HE WILL NOT--CANNOT--EXCHANGE WHAT HE HAS, WHAT HE IS, FOR WHAT HE ONCE WAS.
NONE OF US CAN.

SCOTT WAS RIGHT. I SHOULD HAVE TRIED TO COME BACK. BUT WHEN ANNE DIED--I DIED. HOW DO I EXPLAIN A LOSS LIKE THAT, AND WHAT IT DOES TO A MAN?
HE WOULD UNDERSTAND.
NO. TO UNDERSTAND, YOU HAVE TO LIVE THROUGH IT.
PRECISELY.

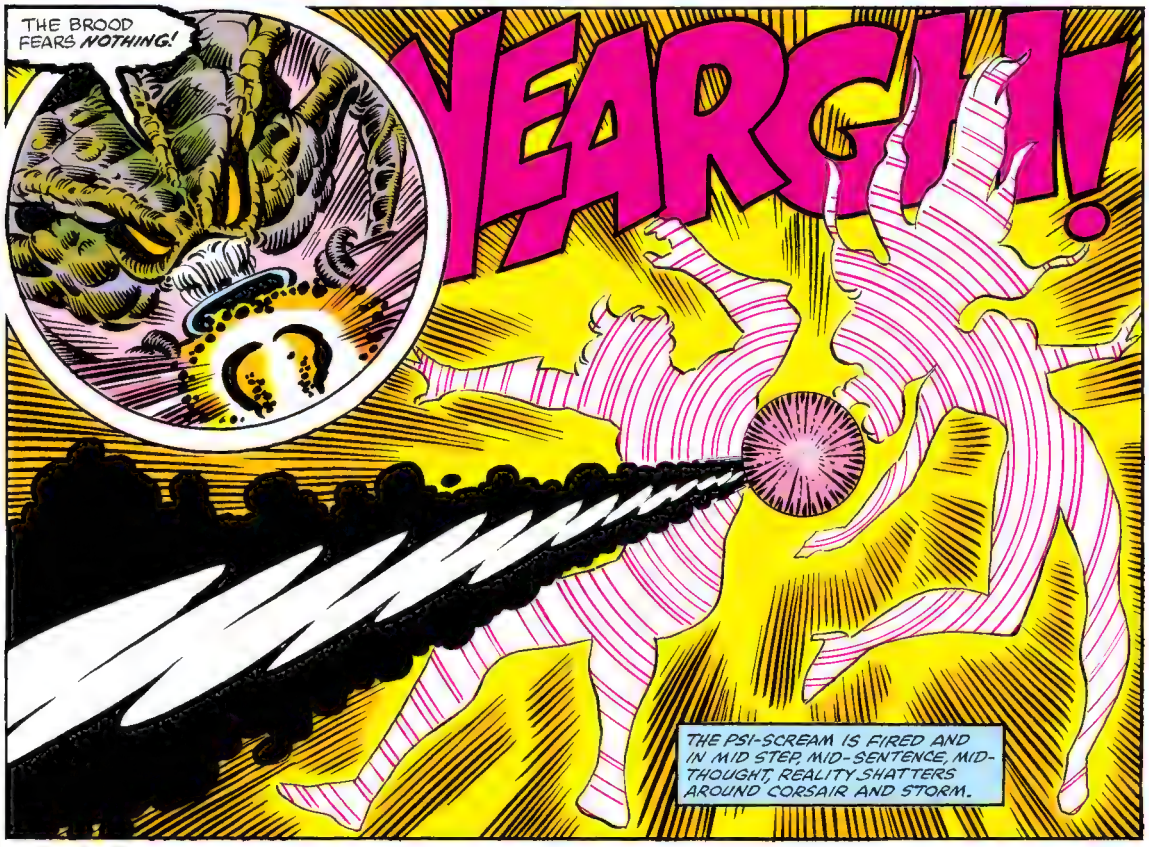
HE WAS IN LOVE WITH JEAN GREY--PHOENIX. I DIDN'T SEE HER AMONG THE OTHER X-MEN.
SHE IS DEAD, CHRISTOPHER.
OH, MY POOR BOY. THEY WERE SO HAPPY, SO... RIGHT TOGETHER. HOW DID IT HAPPEN?
575
AND SO, ONCE MORE THE STORY OF DARK PHOENIX IS TOLD.

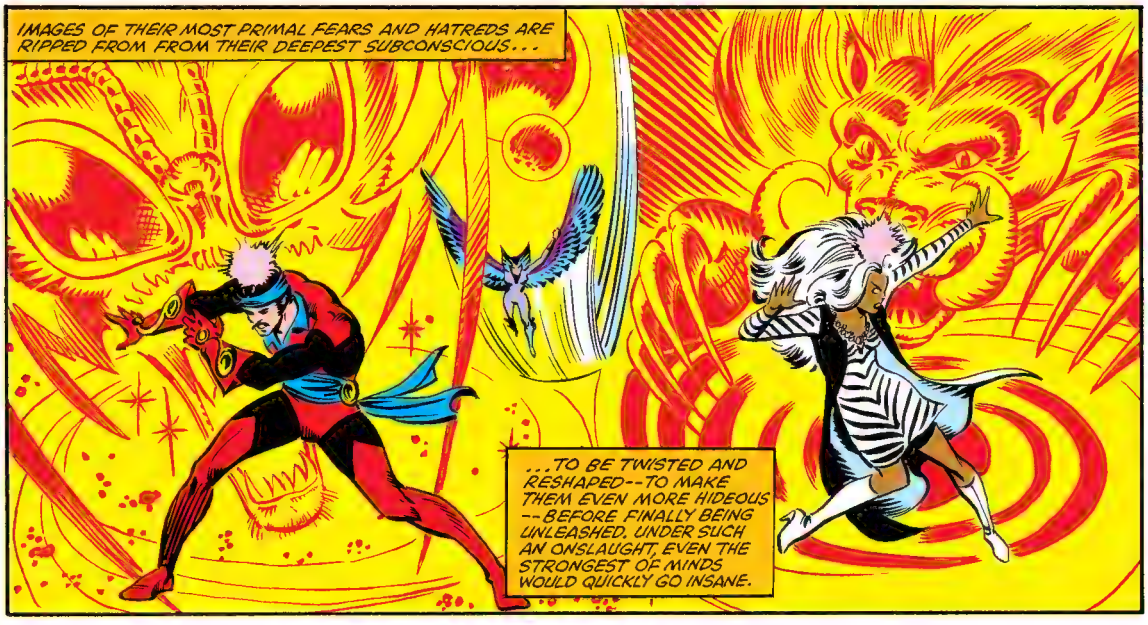
MEANWHILE, IN A CONSTRUCTION SITE ACROSS MADISON AVENUE...
TARGET IN SIGHT, MILADY.

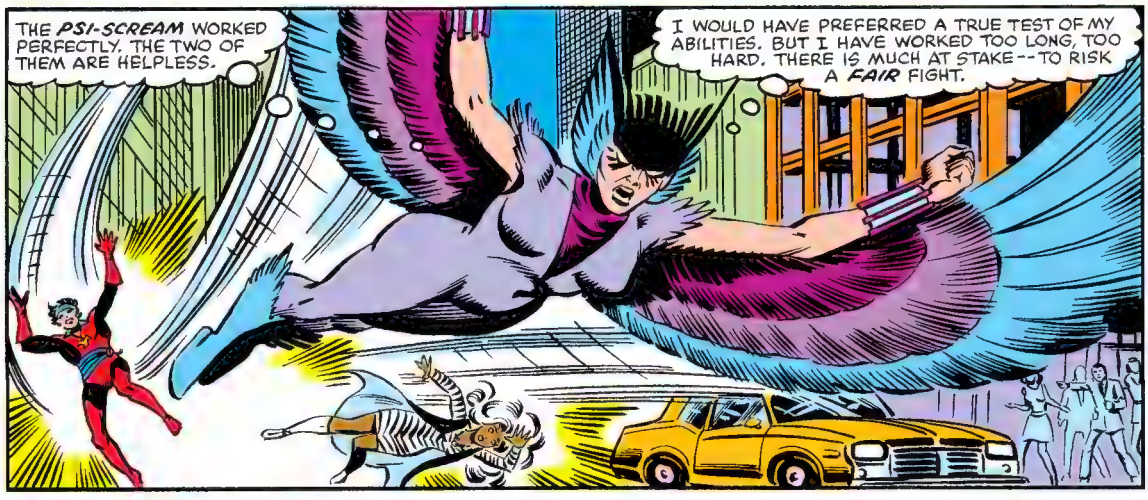
AT YOUR COMMAND, CORSAIR DIES--
--AND THE TERRAN WIND-RIDER WITH HIM!

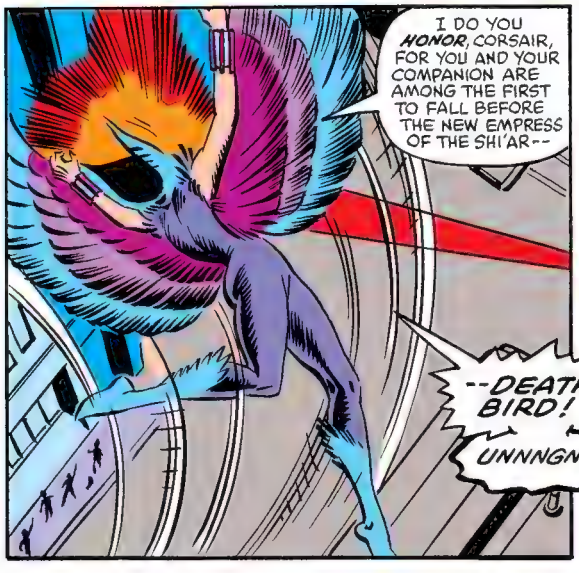

THEY APPEAR TO BE PRIME SPECIMENS, FIT PERHAPS FOR THE MOTHER-OF-US-ALL HERSELF.
DESTROYING THEM SEEMS SUCH A WASTE.
THEY ARE DANGEROUS, SKUR'KLL. GIVEN HALF A CHANCE, THEY MAY WELL DESTROY US ALL.
THEY MIGHT EVEN PROVE A MATCH FOR YOUR PRECIOUS "MOTHER!"

HAVE A CARE, RENEGADE, THOUGH WE ARE ALLIES -- THOUGH I HAVE SWORN TO SERVE YOU -- WE OF THE BLOOD WILL TOLERATE NO DISRESPECT.
I HAVE FOUGHT THEM. YOU HAVE NOT.
IF I -- THE FINEST WARRIOR EVER BORN TO THE AERIE -- RESPECT THEM, YOU SHOULD FEAR THEM.

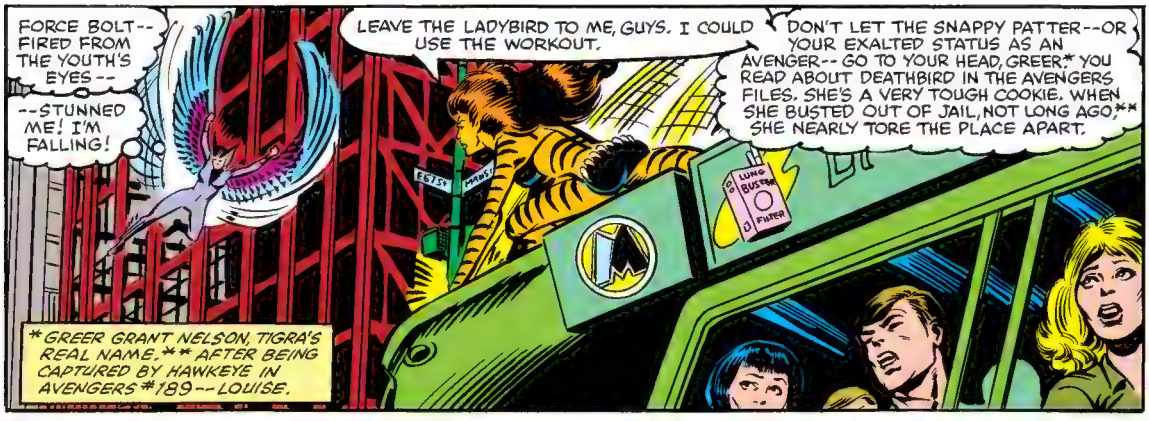

THE BROOD FEARS NOTHING!
YEARGH!
THE PSI-SCREAM IS FIRED AND IN MID STEP, MID-SENTENCE, MID-THOUGHT, REALITY SHATTERS AROUND CORSAIR AND STORM.


IMAGES OF THEIR MOST PRIMAL FEARS AND HATREDS ARE RIPPED FROM FROM THEIR DEEPEST SUBCONSCIOUS...
...TO BE TWISTED AND RESHAPED--TO MAKE THEM EVEN MORE HIDEOUS --BEFORE FINALLY BEING UNLEASHED. UNDER SUCH AN ONSLAUGHT, EVEN THE STRONGEST OF MINDS WOULD QUICKLY GO INSANE.

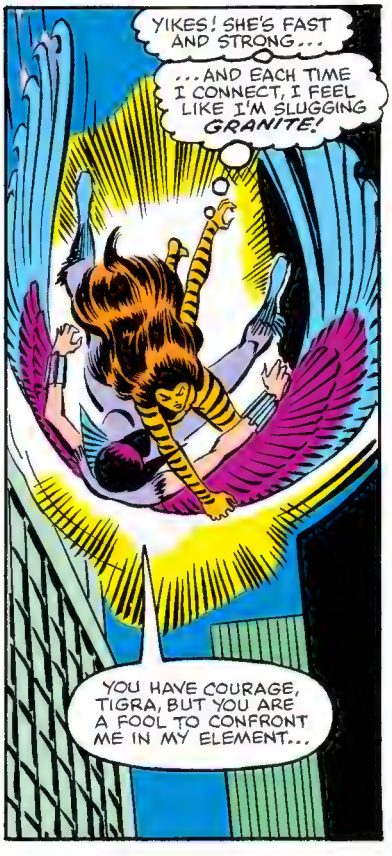

THE PSI-SCREAM WORKED PERFECTLY. THE TWO OF THEM ARE HELPLESS.
I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED A TRUE TEST OF MY ABILITIES. BUT I HAVE WORKED TOO LONG, TOO HARD. THERE IS MUCH AT STAKE--TO RISK A FAIR FIGHT.


I DO YOU HONOR, CORSAIR, FOR YOU AND YOUR COMPANION ARE AMONG THE FIRST TO FALL BEFORE THE NEW EMPRESS OF THE SHI'AR--
--DEATH-BIRD!
UNNNGNH!

BEAUTIFUL, SCOTTY! RIGHT ON TARGET! YOU KNOCKED HER FOR THE PROVERBIAL LOOP!
CORSAIR AND STORM ARE IN DEADLY PERIL. WE MUST AID THEM, CYCLOPS, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

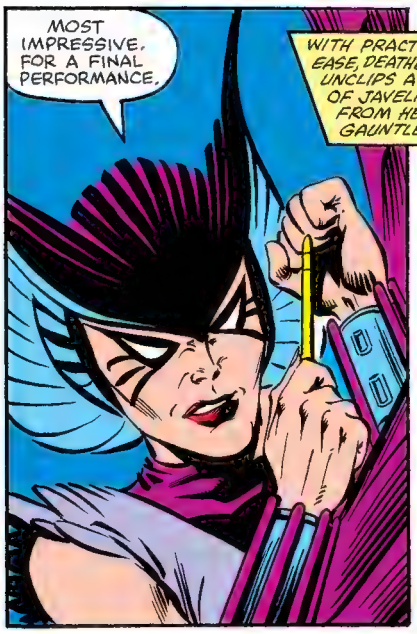

FORCE BOLT--FIRED FROM THE YOUTH'S EYES--
--STUNNED ME! I'M FALLING!
LEAVE THE LADYBIRD TO ME, GUYS. I COULD USE THE WORKOUT.
DON'T LET THE SNAPPY PATTER--OR YOUR EXALTED STATUS AS AN AVENGER--GO TO YOUR HEAD, GREER.* YOU READ ABOUT DEATHBIRD IN THE AVENGERS FILES. SHE'S A VERY TOUGH COOKIE. WHEN SHE BUSTED OUT OF JAIL, NOT LONG AGO,** SHE NEARLY TORE THE PLACE APART.
LUNG BUSTER
FILTER
*GREER GRANT NELSON, TIGRA'S REAL NAME.** AFTER BEING CAPTURED BY HAWKEYE IN AVENGERS #189--LOUISE.

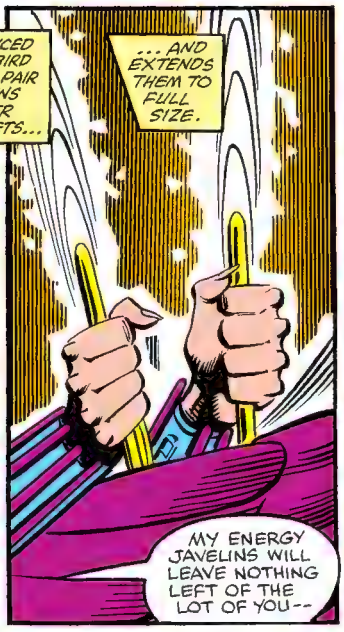
HOWDY-DOODY, FLYGAL. I'M TIGRA, NEW HERO ON THE BLOCK!
I'M YOUR BASIC CAT BY NATURE--AND YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT WE DO TO CANARIES.
I NEITHER KNOW NOR CARE, HATCHLING. BUT IF THAT IS A THREAT--
--IT IS A HOLLOW ONE!

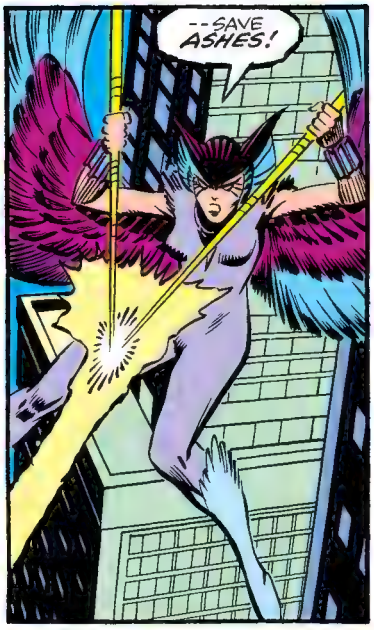

YIKES! SHE'S FAST AND STRONG...
...AND EACH TIME I CONNECT, I FEEL LIKE I'M SLUGGING GRANITE!
YOU HAVE COURAGE, TIGRA, BUT YOU ARE A FOOL TO CONFRONT ME IN MY ELEMENT...

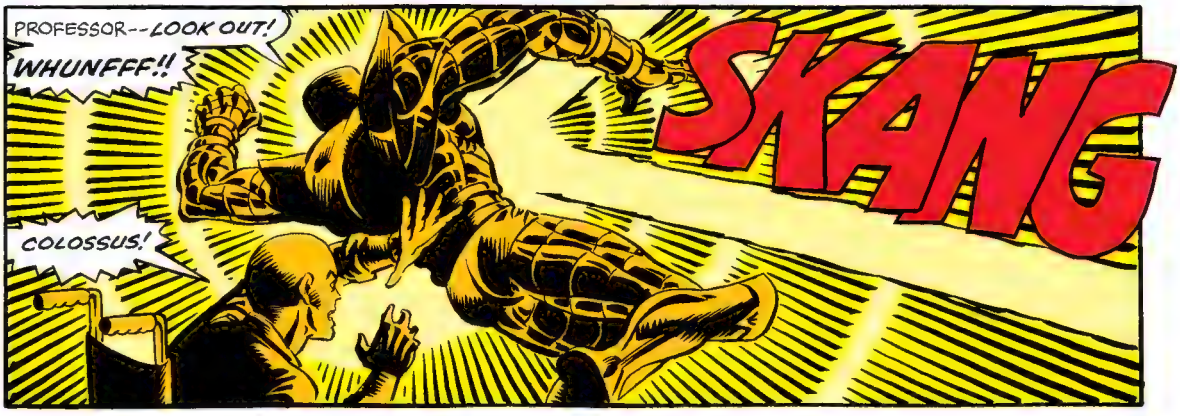
...SO FAR, FAR AWAY FROM YOUR OWN.
WHOOPS!

NICE TRY, LADYBIRD. BUT SPEAKING AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S PREMIER GYMNASTS...
...I DON'T SNUFF THAT EASILY!


MOST IMPRESSIVE, FOR A FINAL PERFORMANCE.
WITH PRACTICED EASE, DEATHBIRD UNCLIPS A PAIR OF JAVELINS FROM HER GAUNTLETS...

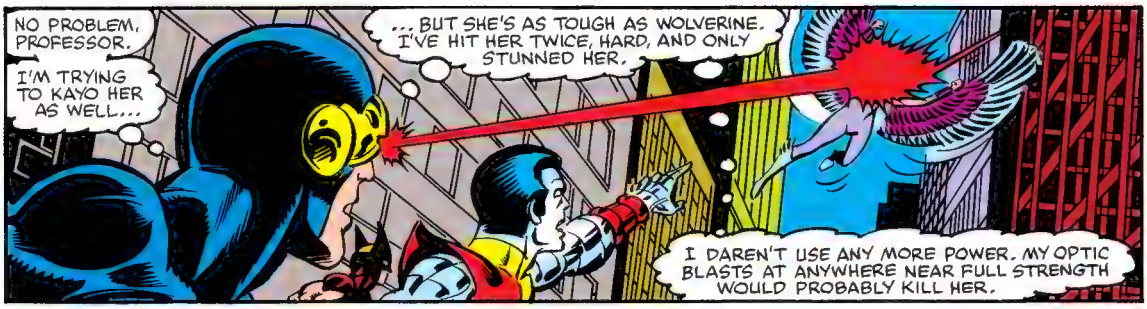

...AND EXTENDS THEM TO FULL SIZE.
MY ENERGY JAVELINS WILL LEAVE NOTHING LEFT OF THE LOT OF YOU--

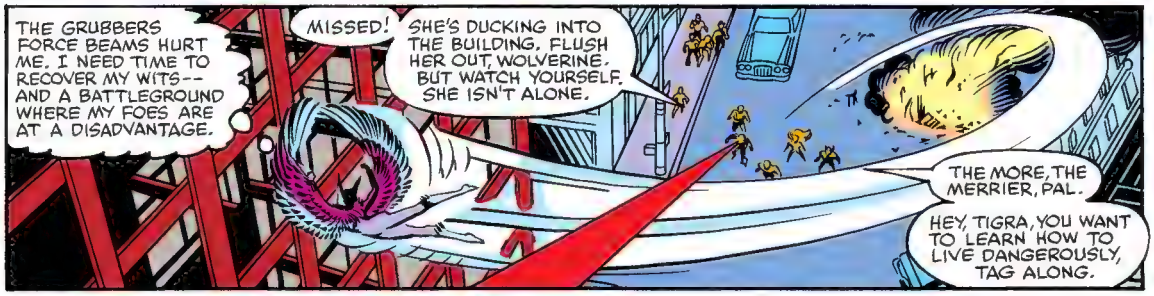

--SAVE ASHES!


PROFESSOR--LOOK OUT!
WHUNFFF!!
COLOSSUS!
SKANG

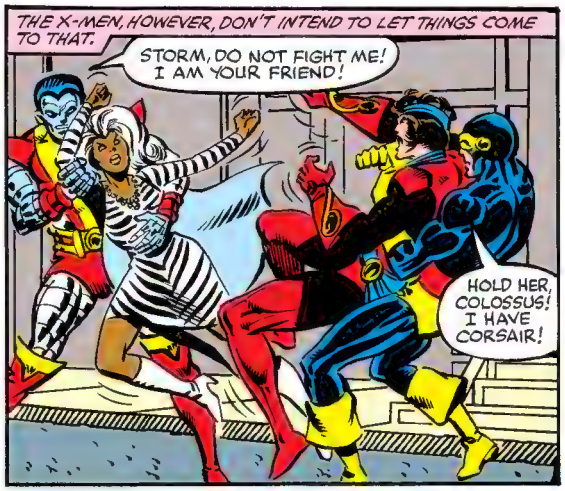
YOW! THAT'LL TEACH SOMEONE WHERE NOT TO PARK.
KRAKOW!
THAT "SOMEONE" IS ME, LADY! AN' THOSE FREAKS ARE GONNA PAY FOR WHAT THEY DID!
I'M CALLIN' THE COPS!

THE POLICE WON'T BE ABLE TO COPE WITH DEATHBIRD'S ADVANCED WEAPONRY.
AND SHE ISN'T ALONE, EITHER. STORM AND CORSAIR WERE FIRED ON BY A SNIPER HIDDEN INSIDE THE IBM CONSTRUCTION SITE.
DEATHBIRD MUST BE DISARMED, CYCLOPS, BEFORE SHE INJURES ANY INNOCENT BYSTANDERS, AND TO ALLOW ME AN OPPORTUNITY TO HEAL OUR STRICKEN FRIENDS.


NO PROBLEM, PROFESSOR.
I'M TRYING TO KAYO HER AS WELL...
...BUT SHE'S AS TOUGH AS WOLVERINE. I'VE HIT HER TWICE, HARD, AND ONLY STUNNED HER.
I DAREN'T USE ANY MORE POWER. MY OPTIC BLASTS AT ANYWHERE NEAR FULL STRENGTH WOULD PROBABLY KILL HER.


THE GRUBBERS FORCE BEAMS HURT ME. I NEED TIME TO RECOVER MY WITS-- AND A BATTLEGROUND WHERE MY FOES ARE AT A DISADVANTAGE.
MISSED!
SHE'S DUCKING INTO THE BUILDING. FLUSH HER OUT, WOLVERINE. BUT WATCH YOURSELF. SHE ISN'T ALONE.
THE MORE, THE MERRIER, PAL.
HEY, TIGRA, YOU WANT TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE DANGEROUSLY, TAG ALONG.

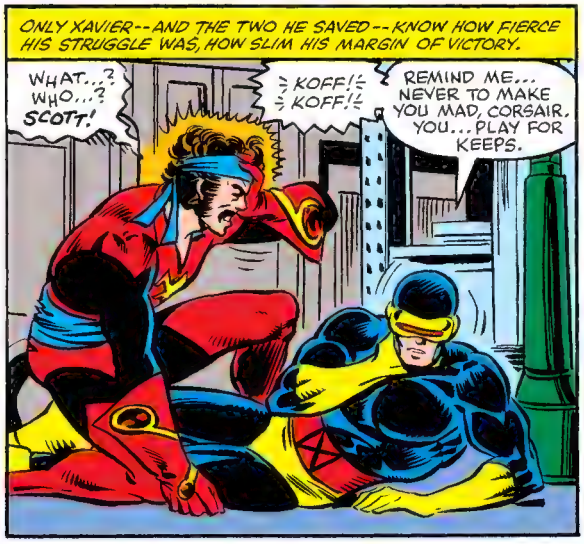
MEANWHILE, OBLIVIOUS TO THE CONFLICT RAGING ABOUT THEM, STORM AND CORSAIR ARE ENGAGED IN A PRIVATE WAR OF THEIR OWN, WAGED WITH ALL THE RUTHLESS FEROCITY THE HUMAN HEART AND SOUL ARE CAPABLE OF.
LEFT UNCHECKED, THEIR FIGHT WOULD NOT END UNTIL ONE OR BOTH OF THEM LAY DEAD.


THE X-MEN, HOWEVER, DON'T INTEND TO LET THINGS COME TO THAT.
STORM, DO NOT FIGHT ME! I AM YOUR FRIEND!
HOLD HER, COLOSSUS! I HAVE CORSAIR!

YOU!
I'VE WAITED--PRAYED--FOR THIS MOMENT, D'KEN! AS YOU KILLED MY WIFE, YEARS AGO--
--NOW I'LL KILL YOU!!
CORSAIR-- NO!
HE THINKS I'M THE SHI'AR EMPEROR!

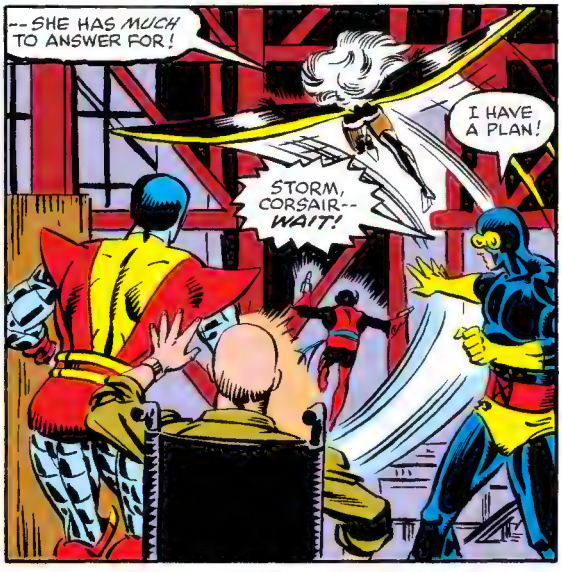
I COULD HURL HIM OFF WITH AN OPTIC BLAST, BUT I DON'T WANT TO HURT HIM. I...
...I-- CAN'T.

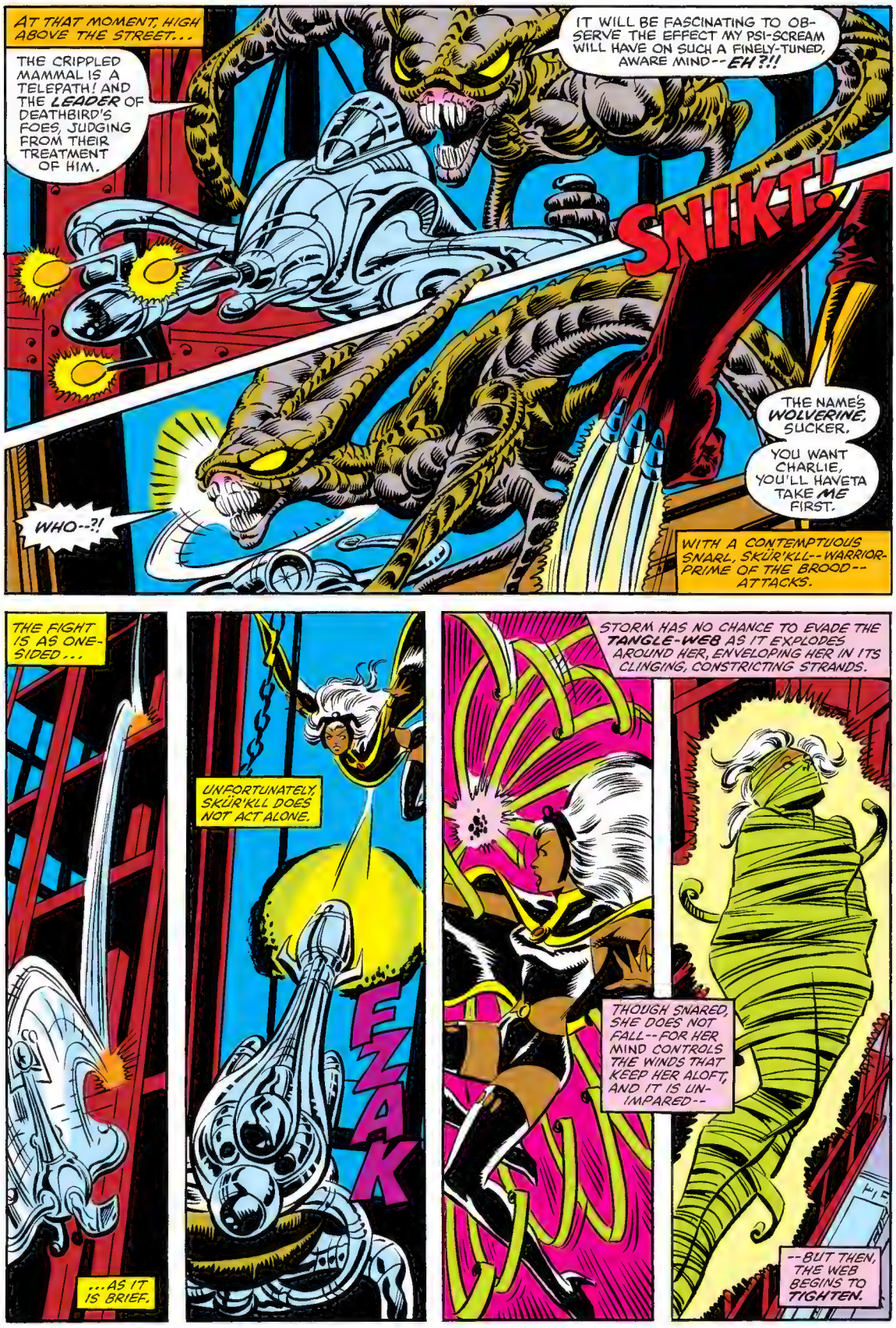
AND YOU SHALL NOT, CYCLOPS. AN ENERGY BEAM WAS USED TO WARP STORM'S AND CORSAIR'S PERCEPTIONS. NOW THAT I HAVE ISOLATED ITS COMPONENT ELEMENTS...
...I CAN USE MY OWN MENTAL ABILITIES TO COUNTERACT IT.
TO THOSE WATCHING, THE CURE SEEMS INSTANTANEOUS.


ONLY XAVIER--AND THE TWO HE SAVED--KNOW HOW FIERCE HIS STRUGGLE WAS, HOW SLIM HIS MARGIN OF VICTORY.
WHAT...? WHO...? SCOTT!
KOFF! KOFF!
REMIND ME... NEVER TO MAKE YOU MAD, CORSAIR. YOU... PLAY FOR KEEPS.

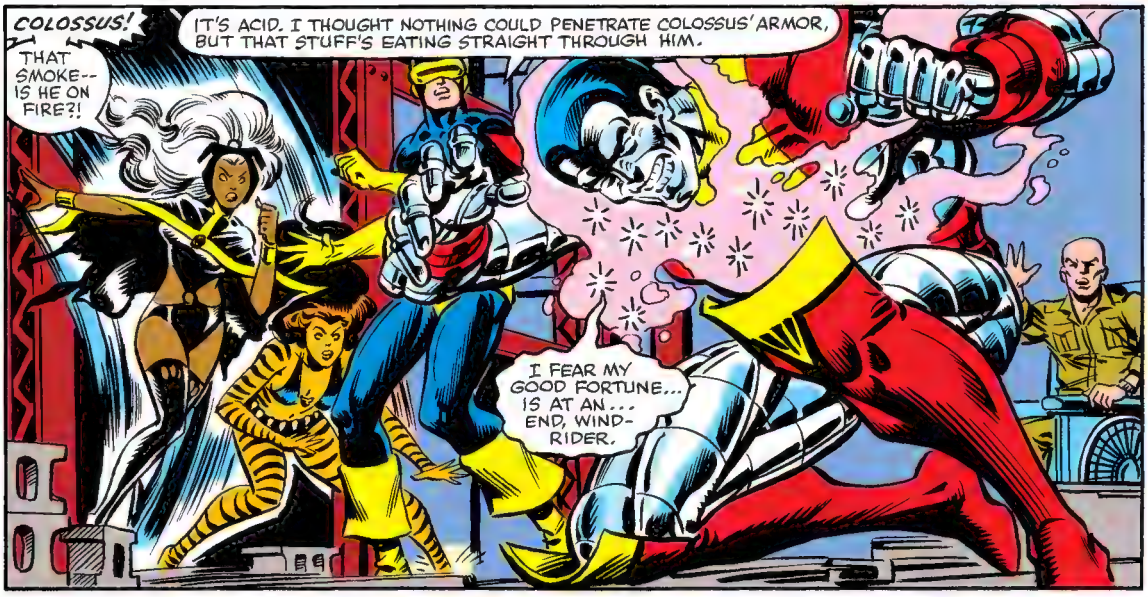
I... I ALMOST--OH, NO, OH, SCOTT, I'M SO SORRY. PERHAPS YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT ME ARE JUSTIFIED,
AND PERHAPS... I PASSED JUDGEMENT BEFORE ALL THE EVIDENCE WAS IN.
THIS WASN'T YOUR FAULT. ONE OF DEATHBIRD'S FLUNKIES FIRED A RAY THAT MADE YOU AND STORM CRAZY.

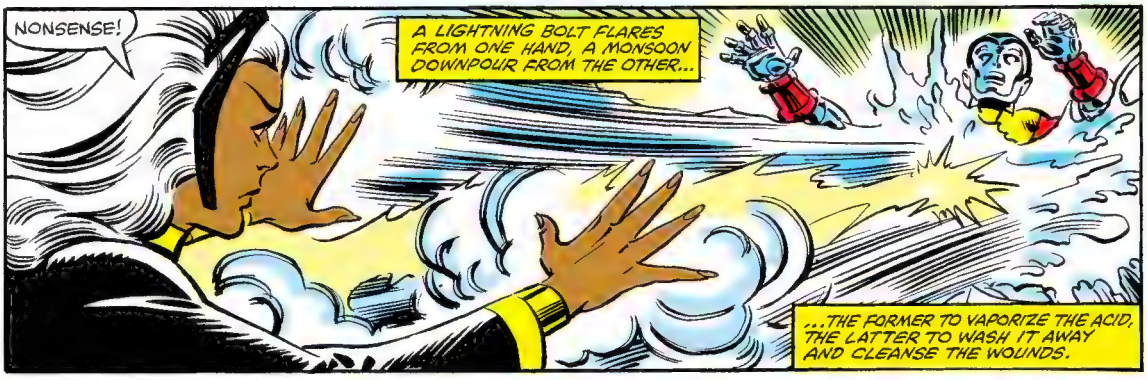
DEATHBIRD?!
SHE'S PART OF THE REASON I CAME TO EARTH. THE STARJAMMERS LEARNED THAT SHE'S A GUIDING FORCE BEHIND THE REBELLION AGAINST LILANDRA.
IF SHE'S HERE, LILANDRA CAN'T BE FAR AWAY.
WHOEVER THIS "DEATHBIRD" IS--


--SHE HAS MUCH TO ANSWER FOR!
I HAVE A PLAN!
STORM, CORSAIR-- WAIT!

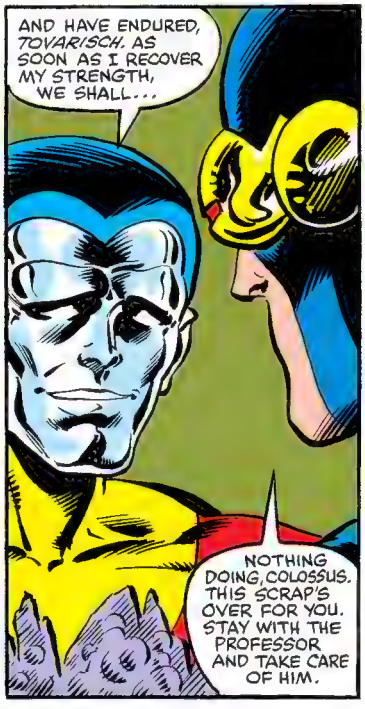

AT THAT MOMENT, HIGH ABOVE THE STREET...
THE CRIPPLED MAMMAL IS A TELEPATH! AND THE LEADER OF DEATHBIRD'S FOES, JUDGING FROM THEIR TREATMENT OF HIM.
IT WILL BE FASCINATING TO OBSERVE THE EFFECT MY PSI-SCREAM WILL HAVE ON SUCH A FINELY-TUNED, AWARE MIND--EH?!!
SNIKT!
THE NAME'S WOLVERINE, SUCKER.
YOU WANT CHARLIE, YOU'LL HAVETA TAKE ME FIRST.
WHO--?!
WITH A CONTEMPTUOUS SNARL, SKÜR'KLL--WARRIOR-PRIME OF THE BROOD--ATTACKS.
THE FIGHT IS AS ONE-SIDED...
...AS IT IS BRIEF.
UNFORTUNATELY, SKÜR'KLL DOES NOT ACT ALONE.
EZAK
STORM HAS NO CHANCE TO EVADE THE TANGLE-WEB AS IT EXPLODES AROUND HER, ENVELOPING HER IN ITS CLINGING, CONSTRICTING STRANDS.
THOUGH SNARED, SHE DOES NOT FALL--FOR HER MIND CONTROLS THE WINDS THAT KEEP HER ALOFT, AND IT IS UNIMPARED--
--BUT THEN, THE WEB BEGINS TO TIGHTEN.

NEARBY, ANOTHER SNIPER ENTERS THE FRAY.
HIS TARGET IS XAVIER.
ONCE MORE, COLOSSUS SHIELDS THE PROFESSOR WITH HIS NIGH-INVULNERABLE ARMORED BODY. IT'S AN INSTINCTIVE REACTION...
...AND A COSTLY ONE.
I'VE BEEN HIT BY SOME FORM OF BOMB!
PROFESSOR, MY CLOTHES -- MY BODY -- I AM BURNING!
CYCLOPS, THAT SHELL WAS FILLED WITH ACID!
I CANNOT HALT THE ACID'S PROGRESS, BUT MY PSI-POWERS CAN AT LEAST NEUTRALIZE THE PAIN IT CAUSES.
TWO SHOTS. TWO X-MEN. DEATHBIRD'S GOONS ARE GOOD.
TIGRA! DIVE FOR STORM! SWING HER TOWARDS WOLVERINE!
AS GOOD AS DONE, CYKE.
THAT SAVES HER. WHO'S GONNA SAVE ME?
STICK AROUND, HOTSHOT. YOU'LL FIND OUT.
STORM DARLIN', DON'T YOU MOVE A FLAMIN' MUSCLE!
I'M -- FREE!!
NOT TOO SHABBY, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF.
SNAG THE LADYCAT, BABE. I'LL HANDLE THE SNIPERS.
WHEW!
FOR A MOMENT THERE, I WAS BEGINNING TO GET WORRIED.
AS WAS I, TIGRA, A FEW MOMENTS AGO.
THANK YOU FOR MY LIFE.

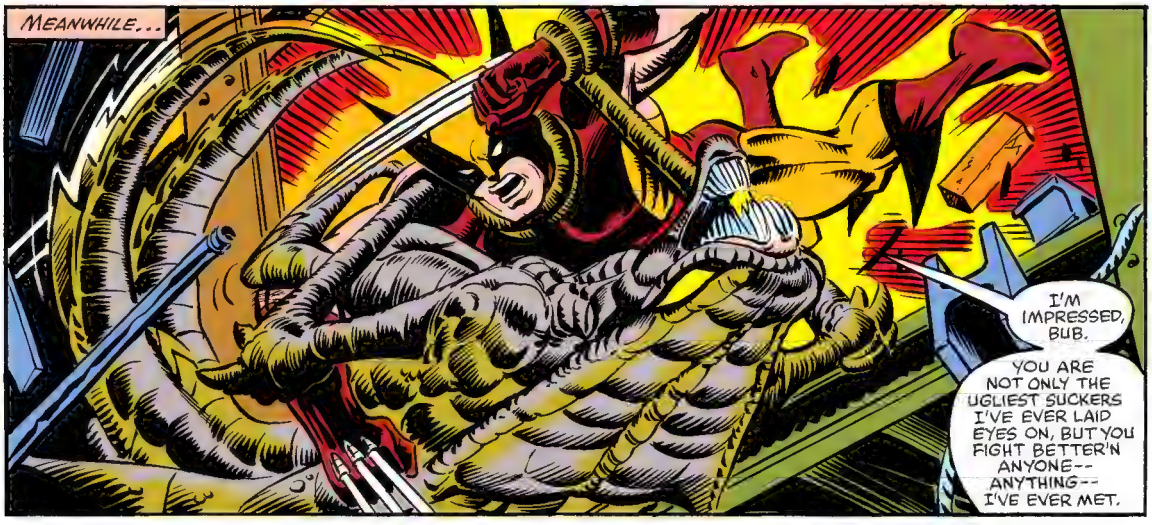

COLOSSUS!
THAT SMOKE-- IS HE ON FIRE?!
IT'S ACID. I THOUGHT NOTHING COULD PENETRATE COLOSSUS' ARMOR, BUT THAT STUFF'S EATING STRAIGHT THROUGH HIM.
I FEAR MY GOOD FORTUNE... IS AT AN... END, WIND-RIDER.

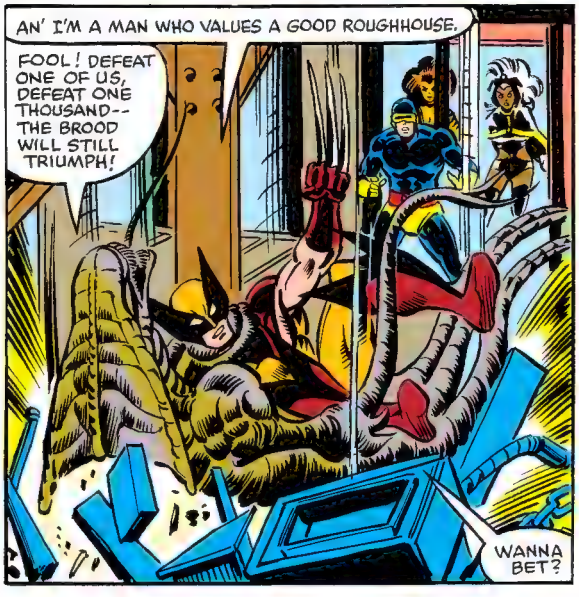

NONSENSE!
A LIGHTNING BOLT FLARES FROM ONE HAND, A MONSOON DOWNPOUR FROM THE OTHER...
...THE FORMER TO VAPORIZE THE ACID, THE LATTER TO WASH IT AWAY AND CLEANSE THE WOUNDS.

I AM A GODDESS OF LIFE, LITTLE BROTHER, AS WELL AS OF STORMS, REMEMBER? IF IT IS WITHIN MY POWER TO SAVE YOU --
--I SHALL.
I... SHOULD NOT HAVE... DOUBTED YOU.
EASY, FELLA. YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH A LOT.

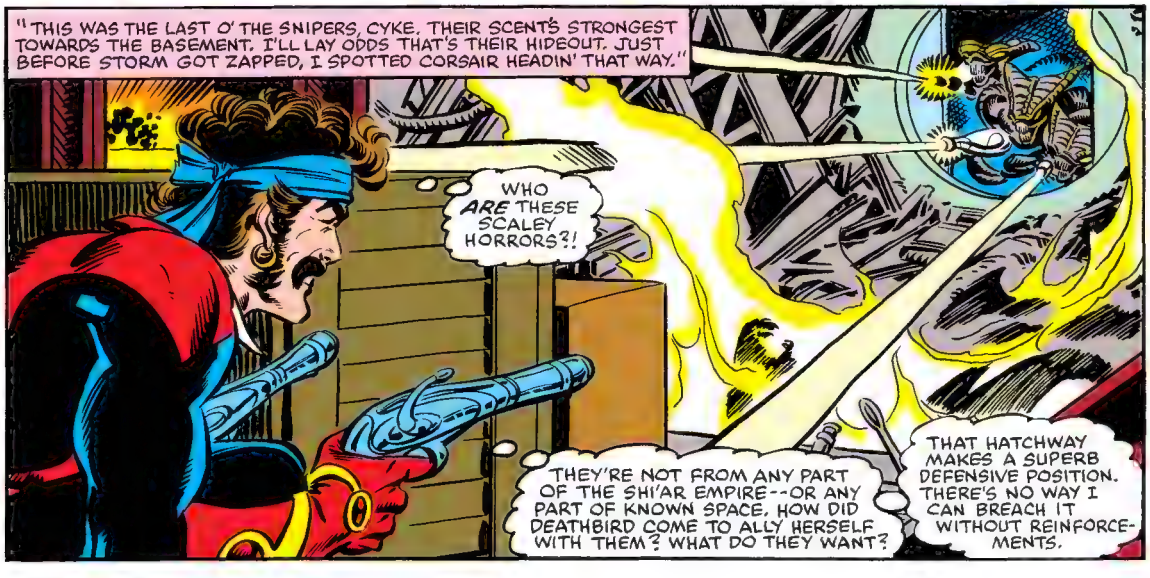

AND HAVE ENDURED, TOVARISCH. AS SOON AS I RECOVER MY STRENGTH, WE SHALL...
NOTHING DOING, COLOSSUS. THIS SCRAP'S OVER FOR YOU. STAY WITH THE PROFESSOR AND TAKE CARE OF HIM.

THE REST OF US WILL CLEAN OUT DEATHBIRD'S NEST.


MEANWHILE...
I'M IMPRESSED, BUB.
YOU ARE NOT ONLY THE UGLIEST SUCKERS I'VE EVER LAID EYES ON, BUT YOU FIGHT BETTER'N ANYONE--ANYTHING--I'VE EVER MET.

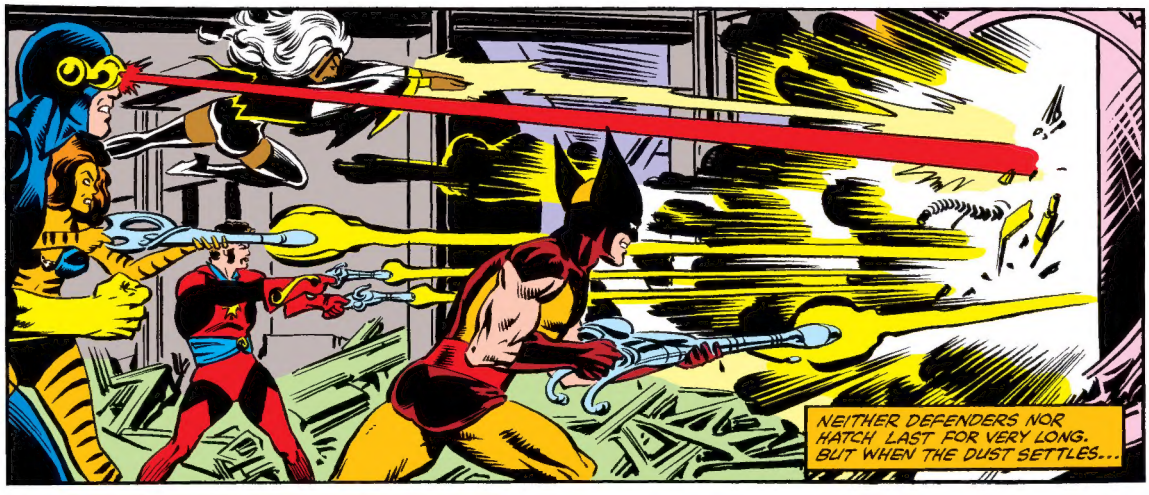

AN' I'M A MAN WHO VALUES A GOOD ROUGHHOUSE.
FOOL! DEFEAT ONE OF US, DEFEAT ONE THOUSAND--THE BROOD WILL STILL TRIUMPH!
WANNA BET?

BLESSED GODDESS, WHAT IS THAT?
BEATS ME, DARLIN', BUT IT AIN'T HUMAN AN' IT AIN'T NICE. IT CLAIMS TO BELONG TO SOME OUTFIT CALLED THE "BROOD," AN' IT'S HOOKED UP WITH DEATHBIRD.
WOLVERINE, IT'S DISINTEGRATING.
YEAH. THEY DO THAT...TIDY BUGGERS, AREN'T THEY?

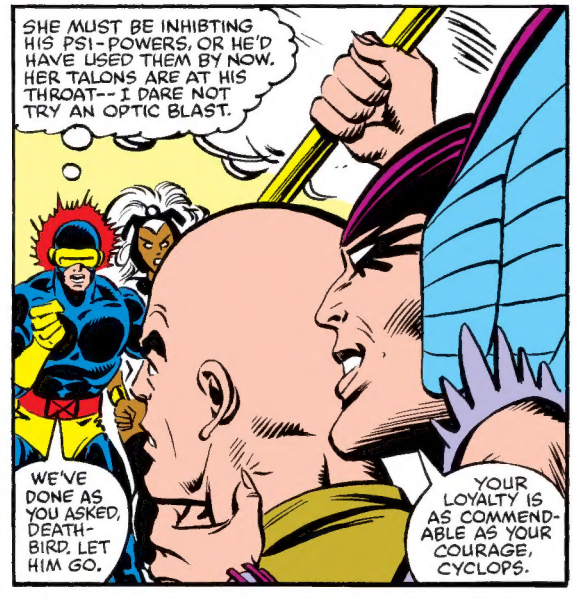

"THIS WAS THE LAST O' THE SNIPERS, CYKE. THEIR SCENTS STRONGEST TOWARDS THE BASEMENT. I'LL LAY ODDS THAT'S THEIR HIDEOUT. JUST BEFORE STORM GOT ZAPPED, I SPOTTED CORSAIR HEADIN' THAT WAY."
WHO ARE THESE SCALEY HORRORS?!
THEY'RE NOT FROM ANY PART OF THE SHI'AR EMPIRE--OR ANY PART OF KNOWN SPACE. HOW DID DEATHBIRD COME TO ALLY HERSELF WITH THEM? WHAT DO THEY WANT?
THAT HATCHWAY MAKES A SUPERB DEFENSIVE POSITION. THERE'S NO WAY I CAN BREACH IT WITHOUT REINFORCEMENTS.

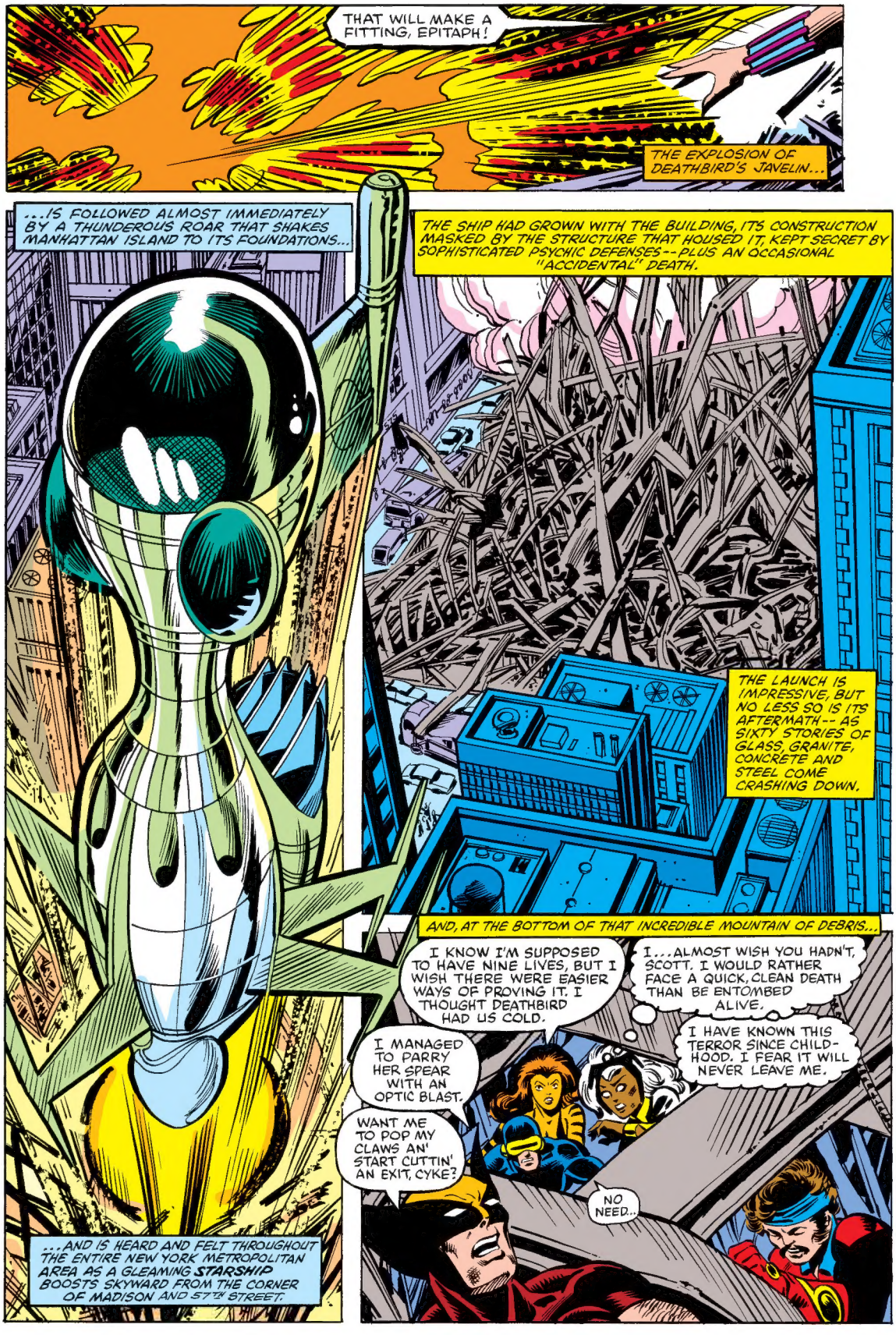
AND, VIRTUALLY ON CUE...
HAVING A GOOD TIME, POP?
NO COMPLAINTS. WHAT KEPT YOU?
TRAFFIC, WHAT ELSE?
SCOTT, WHEN YOU CALLED ME "POP"...
...IT DIDN'T SOUND LIKE A JOKE, OR AN INSULT.

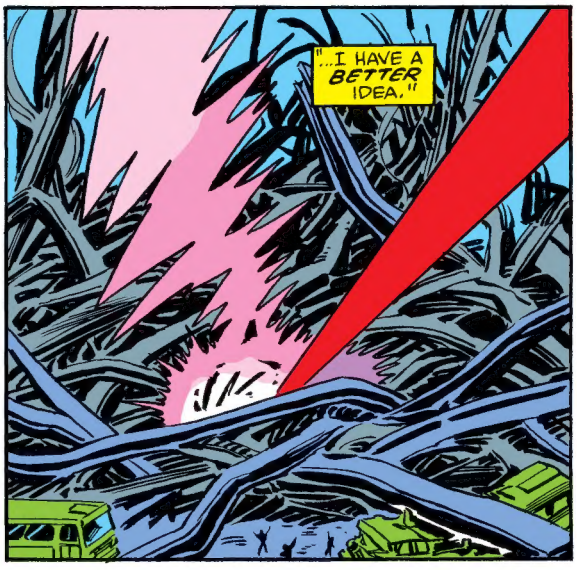
IT WASN'T.
I DON'T KNOW YOU WELL ENOUGH TO HATE YOU, OR LOVE YOU. I DON'T KNOW YOU AT ALL. BUT I'D LIKE TO LEARN.
FAIR ENOUGH.
C'MON, SONNY...
...LET'S RESCUE THE EMPRESS!

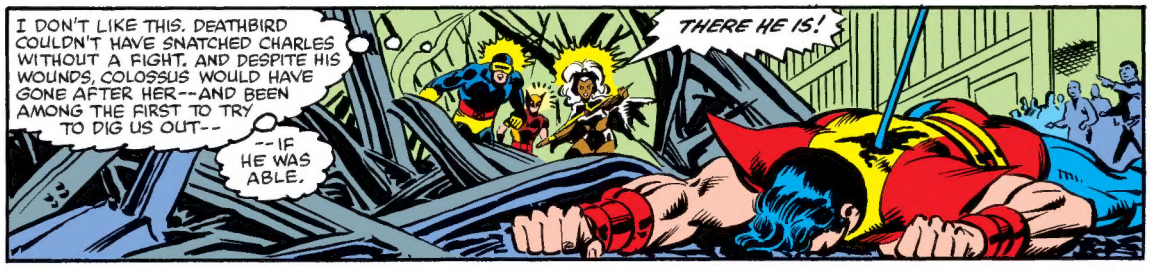

NEITHER DEFENDERS NOR HATCH LAST FOR VERY LONG. BUT WHEN THE DUST SETTLES...

...AND OUR HEROES CHARGE FORWARD...
STAND YOUR GROUND, GRUBBERS, OR THE OLD MAN DIES!
DEATHBIRD-- WITH THE PROFESSOR!
WE LEFT COLOSSUS TO PROTECT HIM! WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED?!


SHE MUST BE INHIBTING HIS PSI-POWERS, OR HE'D HAVE USED THEM BY NOW. HER TALONS ARE AT HIS THROAT-- I DARE NOT TRY AN OPTIC BLAST.
WE'VE DONE AS YOU ASKED, DEATH-BIRD. LET HIM GO.
YOUR LOYALTY IS AS COMMENDABLE AS YOUR COURAGE, CYCLOPS.


THAT WILL MAKE A FITTING, EPITAPH!
THE EXPLOSION OF DEATHBIRD'S JAVELIN...
...IS FOLLOWED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY BY A THUNDEROUS ROAR THAT SHAKES MANHATTAN ISLAND TO ITS FOUNDATIONS...
THE SHIP HAD GROWN WITH THE BUILDING, ITS CONSTRUCTION MASKED BY THE STRUCTURE THAT HOUSED IT, KEPT SECRET BY SOPHISTICATED PSYCHIC DEFENSES--PLUS AN OCCASIONAL "ACCIDENTAL" DEATH.
THE LAUNCH IS IMPRESSIVE, BUT NO LESS SO IS ITS AFTERMATH-- AS SIXTY STORIES OF GLASS, GRANITE, CONCRETE AND STEEL COME CRASHING DOWN.
AND, AT THE BOTTOM OF THAT INCREDIBLE MOUNTAIN OF DEBRIS...
I KNOW I'M SUPPOSED TO HAVE NINE LIVES, BUT I WISH THERE WERE EASIER WAYS OF PROVING IT. I THOUGHT DEATHBIRD HAD US COLD.
I...ALMOST WISH YOU HADN'T, SCOTT. I WOULD RATHER FACE A QUICK, CLEAN DEATH THAN BE ENTOMBED ALIVE.
I HAVE KNOWN THIS TERROR SINCE CHILDHOOD. I FEAR IT WILL NEVER LEAVE ME.
I MANAGED TO PARRY HER SPEAR WITH AN OPTIC BLAST.
WANT ME TO POP MY CLAWS AN' START CUTTIN' AN EXIT, CYKE?
NO NEED..
...AND IS HEARD AND FELT THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA AS A GLEAMING STARSHIP BOOSTS SKYWARD FROM THE CORNER OF MADISON AND 57TH STREET.





NEXT ISSUE: STAR-CHASE!

MINUTEMEN

Sy13nt
Bob